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Video Review™

THE
WORLD
AUTHORITY
ON HOME
VIDEO

DECEMBER 1988

14382 \$1.95/\$2.50 CANADA



'THREE MEN' ON TAPE

BEST PRODUCTS OF THE YEAR

AWARDS FOR 1988's
TOP VIDEO EQUIPMENT

Holiday Movie Roundup:
Over 50 Tapes Reviewed

Plus: Videogames—
The Next Generation;
We Test Sony's 1st VHS





Is it a hassle, or

The Memorex CP8 Universal Remote. Can it do the job of eight infrared remotes? No problem. Can it program



is it Memorex?

whatever, whenever, however you want? No problem. Can we fit in everything about it in this ad? Problem.

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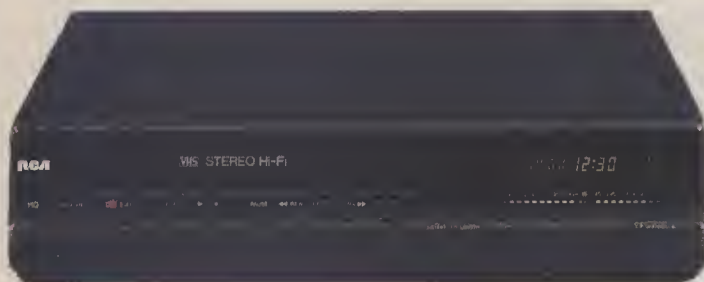
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Cover Photo: Hing/Norton.

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WE'VE SEEN THE FUTURE. AND IT'S JVC.

If at First You Don't Succeed

Way back in 1981, *Video Review* invited readers to send in their home movies on video for the first-ever video movie contest. Bear in mind that this was long before the days of the camcorder, and very few people had videocameras. The results were predictably meager. Well, times have changed. With over 4 million camcorders in use in this country, video has become a major medium of self-expression and one of the primary ways Americans document their lives. So we're going to try again.



JAMES B. MEIGS,
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

The Great *Video Review* Shootoff, which kicked off in our November issue and will run through January, marks the first major home movie contest of the camcorder age. We're particularly excited that this contest is being conducted with the help and sponsorship of RCA, the country's most popular name in camcorders. We can't wait to start seeing the results.

It's not often consumers get to know much about the industry executives who stand behind the products we buy.

One man who had an enormous but largely unseen hand in the progress of home video was Recoton marketing director Paul Perez, who passed away this fall. Though not an engineer himself, Paul had a knack for finding talented people and getting them to work together for the betterment of technology. After supervising the development of Recoton's innovative FRED stereo-TV decoder, Paul turned his attention to the TV broadcast and cable industries, tirelessly prodding them into the stereo-TV age. The widespread availability of MTS stereo on cable today is largely due to his hard work. At the time of his death, Paul was embroiled in the increasingly complex debate over high-definition TV, arguing as always that consumers deserve the best quality technology can deliver. The video world is a poorer place without his insights, enthusiasm and energy.



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Corey Haim and Corey Feldman are revving up for action and laughter!

Available
December 15.

LICENSE TO DRIVE
COREY HAIM COREY FELDMAN

Some guys get all
the brakes!

Shift into high gear with two of today's hottest young actors, Corey Haim ("The Lost Boys") and Corey Feldman ("Stand By Me"), in the hilarious hit action comedy, "License to Drive."

Les (Haim) and Dean (Feldman) are two teenagers longing to live life in the fast lane. But when Les fails his road test, it sets the boys on a collision course with comic disaster.

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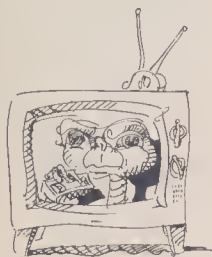
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Alien Correspondence

I found James B. Meigs' article "E.T. Comes Home" (Sept. '88 VR) to be thoroughly researched and very informative. I am an assistant colorist working with one of the top colorists in the country, and I am pleased that the consumer who reads this article will comprehend the complexity and amount of dedicated work that film transferring entails. I feel the art and science of film transferring is an exhilarating career, and I am very proud to be a part of it.

Fredric M. Mushel
Bayside, NY



I was disappointed (but not surprised) to read that the videocassette release of *E.T.* will be encoded with Macrovision. Your article has convinced me to purchase the movie in the laser disc format (which has not yet been invaded by the anti-copy encoder). I wonder if the preview copy Steven Spielberg received was encoded? Given his meticulous concern for quality presentation, I cannot understand why Macrovision was used.

John Miller
Williamsport, MD

I enjoyed James B. Meigs' *E.T.* article, but are you sure the numbers are correct? The article states that "the engineers will make over 30 submasters in all" and these will be used to turn out "6 million or more cassettes."

Applying a little arithmetic yields interesting results: Assuming 35 submasters are made, each would have to run through over 170,000 times. At 2 hours per copy, it would take over 39 years to make the 6 million cassettes.

Rokk
Santa Clara, CA

• Not when one submaster can make hundreds of copies at a pass. —Ed.

Dolby Dimension

Thanks to Stephen A. Booth's "Audio Upgrade" (Aug. '88 VR), I have discovered a whole new world of home video. I set up

a Dolby Surround system and it's wonderful. This added dimension has made great movies greater.

Rob Freeman
Wilbraham, MA

U Got the Look

Let me say that I enjoyed the revamped VR (Sept. '88). The magazine now seems more concise and to the point. Good job!

Paul L. Newhart
Chesapeake, VA

I'm only on page 24. I don't normally write. Great new format.

Gary E. Gold
Coral Springs, FL

Your September issue was received today and, per usual, I read it cover to cover. Nice new look, and keep up the good work.

William R. Elmendorf
Lebanon, IL

Earlier Huston

In his *Film Encyclopedia*, Ephraim Katz states that John Huston's first screen work was small roles in *The Shakedown* in 1928, *Hell's Heroes* in 1930 and *The Storm* in 1930, not in 1948's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* as Gerald Carpenter claims in his Critic's Choice (Sept. '88 VR).

Warren Allen White
Atlanta, GA

The Basement Tapes

Steven Schwartz's fine article on low-cost videotape ("The Blank Tape Rip-off," Sept. '88 VR) was particularly timely since, over the past few months, tape manufacturers have clearly banded together to effect a substantial price increase. Starting in March, it seemed that name brands began to disappear from volume discounters. Virtually all retailers are selling basic HS grade at \$4.99.

Your article was very revealing; there are some low-cost tapes that are quite acceptable, though the majority appear to be junk.

Clinton V. Pickering Jr.
Morris Plains, NJ

Selected correspondence addressed to Video Review, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010, is printed in the "Letters" section. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.

Because our store both sells and services video equipment, Steven Schwartz's article really hit home. Many VCRs are brought in with a problem, and the problem is not the machine but the videotape being used. Since this is a recurring thing, I'd like to make copies of the article and hand them out with all VCRs bought from us.

Leni Vandersteen
Burnaby, BC, Canada

This letter is in reference to your recent article "The Blank Tape Rip-off" in the Sept. '88 issue of *Video Review*. We feel this article is untrue, unfair and extremely damaging to our business and our reputation.

Your article insinuates that we are using the VHS logo on our tape illegally. This insinuation is a total LIE. We contract our production only with approved JVC-licensed factories. We receive a certified statement from our contract factories with each shipment that states unequivocally that the merchandise in that shipment is licensed by JVC.

With regard to your lab test results showing our Nippon brand to be of poor quality, please consider the following: Our package on our T-120 tape carries a full lifetime guarantee. It would seem that if our quality was inferior as you state ("cut-rate crud...dangerously and inexcusably defective...abominable"), then our rate of returns and defectives from our customers would be pretty high. THE TRUTH IS THAT WE HAVE SHIPPED OVER 6 MILLION CASSETTES IN THE PAST 2½ YEARS AND WE HAVE RECEIVED LESS THAN ¼ OF 1% RETURNS.

We supply the finest national chains, and our business is a repeat business. We are selling to the same chains on a regular reorder basis. Certainly we would have lost these accounts if our quality was as poor as you state. We are enclosing a US testing lab report, which compares our quality with JVC and finds it to be comparable.

What baffles us is that in your article you quote the general managers of Memorex and Maxell, but how come you did not quote any of the manufacturers of the tapes you tested? We are listed in the white pages, and it would have been easy for your people to call and clarify whether or not we were actually licensed and to prove the same to you.

The damage you have caused our reputation and business is immeasurable. The fallout from your article has just begun.

WE INSIST ON AN IMMEDIATE RETRACTION AND STATEMENT THAT NIPPON IS A LICENSED TAPE, AND THAT YOU HAVE MADE A

Now that the picture on our
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just about perfect, we decided to
work on something else.



SOI

Our 35" direct-view monitor/receiver has our exclusive Diamond Vision® II picture tube and a wide band video amplifier capable of 560 lines of resolution, compared to the normal 340 lines.

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It's not the easiest thing being perfectionists.

Just when you've developed a 35-inch television that's every bit as clear and sharp as conventional size sets, you see something else that could stand some improvement.

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ND



Our new M-AV1
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125 W/Ch.* with 25 W/Ch. rear
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The connectors are gold plated,
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dual cassette deck comes with
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same kind of Dolby
Surround™ sound you
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tions for switching from
the VCR to the CD

One remote controls everything in this ad.

player to the cassette deck and
so on. And a single illuminated
remote lets you control every-
thing from the comfort of your
own recliner.

For a demonstration,
minus the recliner, visit an
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Theater Systems dealer.

And see with your own
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MISTAKE BY INSINUATING WE WERE NOT, AND THAT OUR RATE OF RETURNED DEFECTIVE MERCHANDISE BASED ON A LIFETIME GUARANTEE ON EACH PACKAGE HAS BEEN LESS THAN ¼ OF 1%.

We have asked our legal counsel to review this matter and advise us to any further steps to be taken.

Jack Gluck
President, Nippon Industries Inc.
New York, NY

•Hold on a minute. We did not insinuate that Nippon or any of the other tapes in our investigation of no-name "off-brand" tapes are not licensed by JVC to carry the official VHS logo. Since JVC alone determines which tape makers receive VHS licenses, we asked JVC directly whether the tapes in our survey were licensed. When JVC refused to answer—and since some tapes do display the VHS logo illegally—we simply stated that consumers have no way of telling which tapes are legitimate.

Nippon says the cassettes it sells under its name all come from suppliers licensed by JVC to make VHS tape. While we commend Nippon's effort to deal only in licensed tape, we shudder at the result: In our tests, Nippon cassettes were plagued with roughly three times the number of dropouts permit-

ted by JVC. That's the real problem. The majority of tapes in our test—whether licensed or not—delivered abysmal performance. And Nippon was among the worst. (By the way, the "lab report" Nippon sent along with this letter appeared to have been based on a simple visual examination of the cassettes and of pictures recorded on the tape and played back. It included no dropout counts, no frequency response or signal-to-noise numbers—no quantitative performance data at all.)

We stand by our test results. JVC is starting to crack down on both unlicensed tape makers and licensed manufacturers who don't meet the standards. We heartily approve. But until the crackdown becomes effective, our original advice still stands: Stick to well-known name brands if you want reasonable blank tape quality. —Ed.

Sun Worshipper

Thank you, thank you, Molly Haskell, for your review of Steven Spielberg's movie version of J.G. Ballard's autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun* (Sept. '88 VR). It disturbs me, of course, that a director of Spielberg's caliber is ignored by the Motion Picture Academy, but that just demeans that organization, not Spielberg. He is, in my opinion, a national treasure. For me, *Empire*

of the Sun is a work of majestic and terrible beauty, yet also a celebration of the human spirit. Your review made that point, for which I must commend you.

A few details about your review: The singing was great, but Christian Bale is not a singer. The actual voice used was that of James Rainbird. And the car was a Packard, not a Rolls.

Jon Bezayiff
West Linn, OR

The Writing's on the Screen

Why are so many video manufacturers still reluctant to pay the extra money to put closed captions on their movies? There are more than 20 million hearing-impaired Americans and many of us have difficulty understanding words spoken on a movie soundtrack. Even *Walker*, with deaf actress Marlee Matlin, is not captioned. The suspect in *Suspect* is deaf, but no captions there either.

Joan M. Cassidy
Sterling, VA

I'd like to know where I can get one of those closed-caption decoders. I understand English speaking very well, but I'm better at reading it. A decoder would be of great use in order to fully enjoy the movies I rent and buy.

Alexis A. Ortiz
Vega Alta, PR

• Closed-caption decoders are available from the National Captioning Institute, 5203 Leesburg Pike, 15th Floor, Falls Church, VA 22041. —Ed.

In Living Black and White

I read Marc Wielage's "Workbench" column ("Black and White Versus Living Color," Sept. '88 VR) with great interest because capturing good, old-fashioned black-and-white movies in crisp, honest monochromatic purity has become more of a dream than a reality.

Dan Nascimento
Silver Spring, MD

Corrections

The Sound Processors chart in VR's October '88 Buyer's Guide incorrectly listed the prices of three Yamaha components. The models and correct prices are: DSP-1, \$999; DSP-3000, \$1,800; SR-50, \$349.

The A/V Receivers chart listed Kenwood's model numbers in reverse order. For accurate data, leave all other columns as they appear on the chart and read the model numbers in descending order (KR-V127R, KR-V107R, KR-V87R, KR-V77R).

In November's "New Products," an incorrect phone number was given for Citizen. The correct number is (213) 558-0961. □

Improve your vision 40%



Toshiba's SV-970 Super VHS VCR offers an obvious 40% improvement in picture quality over conventional VCRs. It may even offer an improvement over all VCRs.

According to *Video Review*, the SV-970 "...stands out from the rest." With "...every digital special effect worth considering, including zoom, shuttle-controlled variable slow-motion and on-screen multiple channel scan."

And "...just about every feature and technology that engineers have been able to shoehorn into one model."

In other words the SV-970 hardly has room for improvement.

In Touch with Tomorrow
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For additional information, circle No. 73 on Reader Service Card.

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with DEREK de LINT ERLAND JOSEPHSON PAVEL LANDOVSKY DONALD MOFFAT DANIEL OLBRYCHSKI STELLAN SKARSGARD

Director of Photography SVEN NYKVIST, A.S.C. Production Design PIERRE GUFFROY Costume Design ANN ROTH Supervising Film Editor WALTER MURCH

Executive Producer BERTIL OHLSSON Based on the Novel by MILAN KUNDERA Screenplay by JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIERE & PHILIP KAUFMAN

Produced by SACL ZAENTZ

Directed by PHILIP KAUFMAN



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ALBUMS, CASSETTES AND COMPACT DISCS.

An **ORION** PICTURES Release

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HOME VIDEO

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For additional information, circle No. 12 on Reader Service Card.



And Then There Were None

Could you please tell me if *And Then There Were None*, the 1945 mystery starring Barry Fitzgerald and Walter Huston, is available on video?

D. Johansen
Pleasanton, CA

This ingenious Agatha Christie thriller was available from United Home Video a couple of years back. The company has since lost the rights to the movie, and there's no word yet on whether anyone else plans to release it. We'd suggest you check video stores that stock older tapes. You may luck out and find a copy for rental.

Trailers on Tape

I understand there is a company in San Francisco that specializes in home video compilations of classic movie trailers. I am looking for trailers to the classic musicals and comedies of the golden days of Hollywood, and I'd like to purchase the Hitchcock trailer collection I've heard is available.

Jack Schaffer
Penn Wynne, PA

SF Rush Video, at 1554 Grove St., San Francisco, CA 94117, is the company, and Trailers on Tape is the line. The company sells two tapes devoted solely to musicals and two to comedies, as well as a 53-minute, 20-trailer cassette of Hitchcock coming attractions. All tapes are \$34.95 and can be ordered by calling (415) 921-TAPE.

Trailers on Tape with a Hitch.



Whatever happened to H.B. Halicki?: Gone in 90 minutes.

Gone in 60 Seconds

Any help you can offer in finding *Gone in 60 Seconds*, a car crash movie with a lot of action and a twist of comedy, would be appreciated.

Richard Boydston
Deming, NM

Media Home Entertainment has released the picture, starring the inimitable H.B. Halicki, on videocassette. The company suggests you have your local dealer order it for you.

Faster Pussycat . . . Kill! Kill!

Watching the rock band *Faster Pussycat* led me to wonder if the movie that inspired that name, *Faster Pussycat . . . Kill! Kill!*, is available on tape.

Susan Sullivan
Darlington, SC

This title—the quintessential girl-gang flick—and others made by nudie pioneer Russ Meyer are available for \$79.50 from the director's own RM Films, P.O. Box 3748, Hollywood, CA 90078.

The Pearl

I would very much like to obtain a copy of *The Pearl*, the 1948 Mexican movie with Pedro Armendariz. Can you help?

Philip Paul
Kamloops, BC, Canada

You bet I can. Facets Video offers the movie version of the John Steinbeck tale for \$69.95 (plus \$5 shipping and handling). Order by mail by writing to Facets Video,

1517 W. Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60614, or call toll-free (800) 331-6197.

I Dream Too Much

My entire family is interested in the great coloratura soprano Lily Pons. Can you locate a VHS copy of her *I Dream Too Much*?

John Dixon
Evans City, PA

Hollywood Home Theater has released this 1935 picture, co-starring Henry Fonda and Lucille Ball, on video for \$59.95. Contact Movies Unlimited, an HHT distributor at 6736 Castor Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19149, to secure a copy.

Shadows Run Black

Where can I rent or buy an old Kevin Costner movie called *Shadows Run Black*?

J. Nelson
Piermont, NY

Before he made it big in *The Untouchables* and *No Way Out*, then-unknown Costner had a small role in this 1981 slasher movie, starring the still-unknown William J. Kulzer. The movie is available from Lightning Video for \$59.98. You can order it by phone by calling Inovision at (203) 978-5568.

As a service to our readers, Video Review will help track down hard-to-find tapes or discs. Send requests to Video Review's Video Hunter, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.



Panasonic introduces the camcorder that can hold the picture steady even when you can't.

Even when your feet are firmly planted on the ground, it's not always easy to hold your camcorder steady. That's why Panasonic introduces the OmniMovie™ camcorder with EIS. Electronic Image Stabilization.



Without EIS



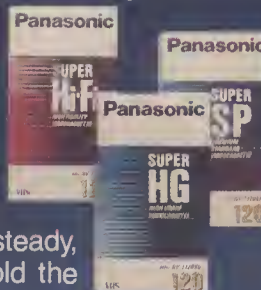
With EIS

EIS can help hold your shots steady, even if your balance is a little shaky. It senses every time the camcorder jumps or jiggles and automatically corrects for that unwanted motion. It uses a sophisticated system that combines a counterbalanced floating lens with an electronic motion sensor.

And this PV-460 OmniMovie camcorder reacts to the action with more than just EIS. It will automatically focus

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Naturally the 8" disc doesn't run quite as long as the 12" disc, but it's packed with all the quality you appreciated in the larger one. The 8" will also turn your head with up to 425 lines of razor sharp resolution. And again, digital audio sound. All of which makes family entertainment more entertaining than ever.

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with a superior CD player) we'll also offer you 5 CDs for the price of one. For more details, see your participating Sony dealer. This offer is good only from September 1, 1988 through January 31, 1989. So catch it while you can.



FREEZE FRAMES

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Video is what makes music come to life. If there had been video in Beethoven's time, his music would've been better and more popular."

Officially designated a "cult band" by *Time* magazine, They Might Be Giants barrel into the new year with their second LP, *Lincoln* (named for the Massachusetts city, not the president—well, maybe both). The duo's eponymous first LP is one of the biggest-selling independent records ever—they call it "the *Dark Side of the Moon* of the alternative charts."

The band that cites "jamming with Sebastian Cabot" as the high point of their careers includes video on their list of tools for achieving "world domination," claiming, "Video is what makes music come to life. If there had been video in Beethoven's time, his music would've been better and more popular."

Photo: Ebert Roberts



HE SINGS THE BODY ELECTRIC

The most provocative book title we've run across this month is *I Am a VCR*, by Marvin Kitman. This Random House volume purports to be the autobiography of Mr. Kitman, a cultural critic for New York's *Newsday*.

Now we could give Mr. Kitman the benefit of a doubt and assume that the title is allusive, a high-tech, late-20th-century variation on Christopher Isherwood's *I Am a Camera*. But we don't feel like it. We feel like asking: What format is Mr. Kitman? Does he have picture-improving HQ circuitry? Where are his rewind and fast-forward buttons? And does his significant other know how to operate his timer mechanism? Just asking.



Illustration: Mark Falls

C A M C O R D E R N O T I N C L U D E D



So you say you want to smoke home video movies, but lack the proper theme. Well, if your family and friends are really that dull, you have our sympathies. And the folks of o Toms River, New Jersey, company called Hollywood Make a Movie have o suggestion: Pick up their Home Maviemaking Kit and leave the conceptualizing to them.

The people pictured at left are enjoying (we assume) the props, costumes and storyboards (which aid in shot blocking) that comprise

the Comedy Kit. They're shooting the sketch called "Warks Like a Chorm," wherein o lozy wife hypnotizes her major-league slob hubby into daing the housework. There's Mom playing the part of the wife, Dod getting mesmerized as the husbond, Sis popping in the supplied background music tope, and little Beov playing with the not-included clopboard (says there that this maviie stars "The Smiths"—funny, we thought they'd broken up). We don't know who the Lyle

Wagganer type behind the camcorder is, and we don't want to know.

The other sketches in the Comedy Kit include "Kidnapped," a subject which, as Patty Hearst will tell you, is always good for o few yucks, and "Not My Table," o variation on the classic rude-waiter scenario. Other kits explore different genres, like Horror and Children's. No plons yet far an Elliptical-Structured-Phenomenological-Dromo-a-lo-Last-Yeor-at-Morienbod Kit yet, but we're pushing for it.

The horror, the horror (Part 2): After years of inactivity, **Marlon Brando** is going back to work. Upon finishing *A Dry White Season*, in which he plays an anti-apartheid South African lawyer, he will take on *Jericho*, a political thriller which he wrote and is co-producing. And next spring, he teams with **Matthew Broderick** in *The Freshman*, a comedy about a Vermont kid who goes to film school in New York and is taken under the wing of a gangster businessman. Brando doesn't play the kid from Vermont.

Clint Eastwood, the Last Serious Man in Hollywood, is also hard at work, now that he doesn't have to worry about city council meetings. After overseeing the release of *Bird*, his biopic on jazz great **Charlie Parker**, he began *Pink Cadillac*, an action-adventure about a fugitive hunter. After that



he takes on *White Hunter, Black Heart*, the story of director **John Huston** on location for the classic *The African Queen* (CBS/Fox).

Another exemplar of the work ethic: former *Magnum* star **Tom Selleck** (pictured). *Three Men and a Baby*

(Touchstone) provided the TV hunk with a hit movie; now he's lining up two more in quick succession to prove *Baby* wasn't a fluke. *Her Alibi* teams him with supermodel **Paulina Porizkova**. *Hard Rain*, a thriller scheduled to start shooting in February, has a harder edge—Selleck plays a framed man out to clear his name and get revenge.

Is **Danny DeVito** trying to tell us something? After the success of the aptly named *Throw Momma from the Train* (Orion), his next directorial effort, *The War of the Roses*, is about a couple who try to end their union by killing each other.

Question: Who looks more like famous *Life* photographer Margaret Bourke-White:

Barbra Streisand or former Angel **Farrah Fawcett**? Answer: Decide for yourself. La Streisand has announced plans to play the part on the big screen, and Farrah will tackle a similar project for TV.

Zoom

By Laurie Werner

ART-MOVIE MUNCHIES

During its theatrical release, *The Last Emperor* was that rarest of rare birds: a genuine piece of "cinema" that made an impact on general audiences. Nelson Entertainment is hoping that popular acceptance of Bernardo Bertolucci's historical epic continues in the video domain.

To ensure that title character Pu Yi (to whom Bertolucci once referred in a TV interview as "the Chinese E.T.") finds a home in mainstream USA, Nelson has joined forces with



Tsingtao beer and Chun King frozen foods for a joint promotion: the "Take Home Chinese Tonight" sweepstakes. Get it? This doesn't really stick in our craw so much, since, epic art movie or no, a video viewing

isn't complete without the requisite munchies. The multifaceted aspect of the promotion allows it to hit supermarkets and liquor stores as well as your local video outlet.

The prizes? Why, you could win a four-day trip to San Francisco's Chinatown at the height of Chinese New Year. Entry blanks are bound to be plentiful, but act fast—the sweepstakes is almost up, running through the end of December.

WEAR MY CAMCORDER AROUND YOUR NECK (OR SOMETHING)

The attractive money clip you see stuffed to the gills with cash comes from a Brooklyn, New York, company called State of the Art. A quick look at the company's catalog reveals that these guys are really into video. State of the Art offers camcorder key chains, resolution-chart lapel pins, VU-meter tie clips—you name it. All the video accessories for one's wardrobe are in the catalog. The jewelry is enamel on gold plate and, as you can see, makes a definite fashion statement.

(But then again, anything looks good accompanied by money.)

To top it all off, the president of State of the Art happens to be ... Len Feldman! No, not Len Feldman, VR's technical editor. This is an entirely different Len Feldman, so keep those conflict-of-interest comments to yourself. Still, talk about bizarre coincidences...

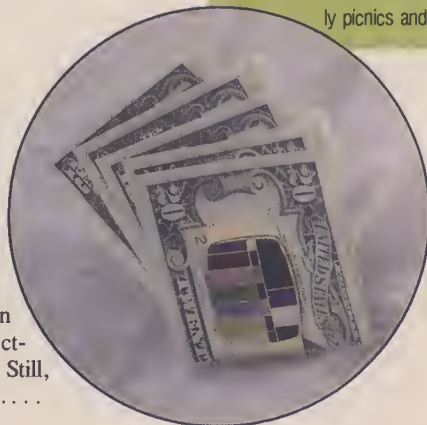


Photo: Patricia Sener

CHEESE IT, IT'S THE COPS—OH WAIT, WE ARE THE COPS

Metro North commuter railroad honchos were not amused when a videocassette made by some of its officers in Manhattan's Grand Central Station recently came to light.

The tape was shot in 1983 and languished in the safe of the Metro North police chief until early August, when CBS-TV news in New York got a copy and broadcast parts of it. Highlights: Sgt. Richard DeClara frolicking in nothing but his police hat and asking a homeless man, "When did you notice you were turning black?"

Obviously the answer to the question "Are these guys funny, or what?" is "Or what." The seven officers involved in the making of the tape were suspended without pay; Metro North president Peter E. Stangl told *The New York Times* that he was "morally outraged." One of the officers involved, Sgt. Frank Dowd, tried explaining the tape to the *Times*: "We did a little humor bit. This was during the strike. We were under a lot of stress." Most New Yorkers agree that harassing homeless people with racist banter is a great stress reliever, but few make tapes of themselves doing it.

Actually, this tape wasn't the only piece of homemade video revealing the core of a rotten Apple. The amateur tapes of police brutality in Tompkins Square Park (see "Scoop: the Pros," Nov. '88 VR) were quite, um, revealing. And let's not forget the Robert Chambers slumber party tape, wherein the guy who strangled Jennifer Levin in Central Park is shown joyfully twisting the head off a toy doll. Since the inception of the camcorder, *Video Review* has been encouraging home videographers to get creative. Given these kinds of results, we suddenly want to see lots more videos of family picnics and toddlers.



HIT LIST



This Month	TOP TAPES	Last Month
1	E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL Henry Thomas, Drew Barrymore; MCA, \$24.95	—
2	CINDERELLA Animated feature; Walt Disney, \$29.95	—
3	BEETLEJUICE Michael Keaton, Geena Davis; Warner, \$89.95	—
4	RAMBO III Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna; IVE, \$89.95	—
5	BROADCAST NEWS Holly Hunter, Albert Brooks; CBS/Fox, \$89.98	1
6	MOONSTRUCK Cher, Nicolas Cage; MGM/UA, \$89.95	2
7	GOOD MORNING, VIETNAM Robin Williams; Touchstone, \$29.95	3
8	BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY Michael J. Fox, Phoebe Cates; MGM/UA, \$89.95	—
9	PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES Steve Martin, John Candy; Paramount, \$89.95	4
10	DEAD HEAT Joe Piscopo, Treat Williams; New World, \$89.95	—

This Month	TOP DISCS	Last Month
1	MOONSTRUCK Cher, Nicolas Cage; MGM/UA LV, \$34.95	1
2	FATAL ATTRACTION Michael Douglas, Glenn Close; Paramount LV, \$34.95	2
3	THE LAST EMPEROR John Lone, Peter O'Toole; Nelson LV, \$39.98	3
4	FULL METAL JACKET Matthew Modine, Adam Baldwin; Warner LV, \$34.95	—
5	SUSPECT Cher, Dennis Quaid; Image LV, \$44.95	4
6	EMPIRE OF THE SUN Christian Bale, John Malkovich; Warner LV, \$39.98	—
7	STAKEOUT Richard Dreyfuss, Emilio Estevez; Touchstone LV, \$44.95	—
8	WALL STREET Michael Douglas, Charlie Sheen; CBS/Fox LV, \$49.98	5
9	THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR Ruben Blades, Sonia Braga; MCA LV, \$34.98	—
10	BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED Hume Cronyn, Jessica Tandy; MCA LV, \$34.98	—

"Hit List" is based on a nationwide survey of leading video software specialty stores, chains, mass merchandisers and wholesalers. The list includes titles taken from retailers' current top tape and disc lists as well as distributors' prerelease sales printouts.

CLOSE-UP: MEG RYAN

As Sean Connery's sexually rebellious daughter in *The Presidio* (upcoming from Paramount), Meg Ryan was called upon to do things that no self-respecting Connecticut homecoming queen would think of. But it's a long way from Connecticut, and over the last few years Ryan has been building a reputation for versatility that belies her perky appearance. Memorable in supporting roles in such movies as *Top Gun*, *Innerspace* and *D.O.A.*, she'll soon be seen in Rob Reiner's *Boy Meets Girl*, scripted by Nora Ephron.

VR spoke to Ryan recently about making the switch from supporting player to star and the difficulties of being a young and pretty face in Hollywood.

VR: *Some critics said your character (Donna) in The Presidio seemed a little sketchy. Was there more to her than what ended up on the screen?*

RYAN: Yes. There are some scenes we shot that aren't there, and there are some scenes that

should have been in the script but weren't. The most difficult thing about the role was that I had to suggest so much with so little. I had to suggest a whole history. Donna sort of provided the emotional glue of the movie, but she wasn't the focus.

VR: *Her clothes said quite a lot about her character.*

RYAN: Yeah, that was part of her whole defense mechanism—something I thought she concentrated on, that she was aggressively sexual. I think it had a lot to do with attention-getting. Women do that. I think the relationship you have with your father predates a lot of the relationships you have with men. And if you find out you can control and manipulate men sexually, you'll probably keep doing it.

VR: *Are you an aggressive person?*

RYAN: I knew that question was going to come up. *The Presidio* was the first time I thought about that in terms of a role. I was afraid to take the part because I'd never had to put it all out there that way. I thought, no one's ever

going to be able to take me seriously again. Watching the movie, I cringe, because I don't think of myself like that.

VR: *How do you think of yourself?*

RYAN: As a goon.

VR: *A goon?*

RYAN: Yeeesss... like, Kim Basinger is a woman who is sexy.

VR: *Are there any actresses you particularly admire?*

RYAN: Uh, Rosey Grier. Oh no, wait... that's a guy.

VR: *Was [Presidio star] Sean Connery a hero of yours? Did you watch the Bond movies?*

RYAN: You know, Roger Moore was the guy I knew to be James Bond. But my mom knew Sean, and she whipped out to the set. After she met him, she sat down by me and said, "I'm so glad I gave birth to you."

VR: *A lot of your movies have been more mechanical than*



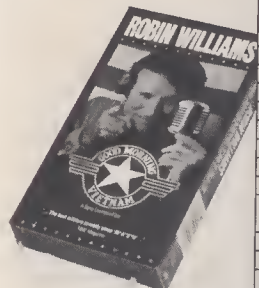
people-oriented. The Presidio will probably be remembered more for its car chases than its politics; Innerspace for its effects; Top Gun for its airplanes. Is that frustrating?

RYAN: Yes, because the work is emotional. The movies I'd like to make are the kind people look at and feel a connection to, more emotionally than viscerally.

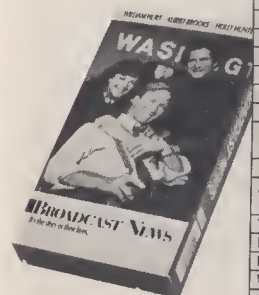
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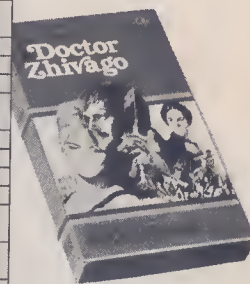
GOOD MORNING, VIETNAM
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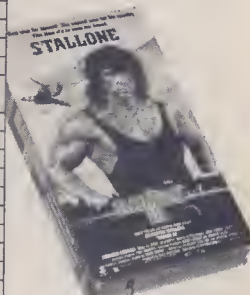
BROADCAST NEWS
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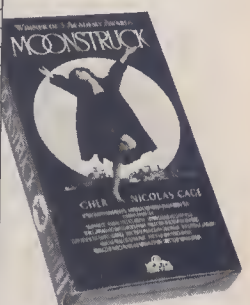
FATAL ATTRACTION
4393072



DR. ZHIVAGO
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RAMBO II
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MOONSTRUCK
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ROBOCOP	2350022	RETURN OF THE JEDI	3547532	CROCODILE DUNDEE	4297122
PLATOON	6500282	SHORT CIRCUIT	3607192	BRADDOCK: MISSING IN ACTION III	7250022
THE PRINCESS BRIDE	1250052	THE GODFATHER PART II	0018592	THE LAST EMPEROR	1974002
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HELLO AGAIN	5487012	THE UNTOUCHABLES	4321042	GREASE	2074312
THE AFRICAN QUEEN	0511362	SILVERADO	1810242	M*A*S*H	0055382
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THE LOST BOYS	6315072	WITNESS	4114052	LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (1986)	6297172
AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN	2021352	PRINCE OF DARKNESS	2245012	STAR TREK—THE MOTION PICTURE	2035212
FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF	4273102	CHARIOTS OF FIRE	6014432	TOOTSIE	1509122
FUNNY GIRL	1511262	ROMANCING THE STOKE	0894252	SCARFACE (1983)	2168042
BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID	0517632	DOCTOR DOOLITTLE	0732212	BILL COSBY, HIMSELF	0935342
FATAL BEAUTY	2785072	OVERBOARD	3657002	CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD	4294152
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND	1510272	THE SICILIAN	4953092	LAWRENCE OF ARABIA *	1514312
BRIGADOON	2542352	BLUE HAWAII	0673302	THE COLOR OF MOONEY	5470592
CHARLOTTE'S WEB	2095282	HOOSIERS	6550192	STAR TREK II—THE WRATH OF KHAN	2013352
RISKY BUSINESS	6033402	BLAZING SADDLES	0012482	THE DEER HUNTER	2124152
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THE MUSIC MAN	6147012	MY LIFE AS A DOG	4391092	GIGI	2508112
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SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS	2518352	JUMPIH' JACK FLASH	3627072	THE COUCH TRIP	2352002
MANNEQUIN	3439132	STEEL DAWN	4951012	CADDYSNACK	6023262
JAHE FOHDA'S HEW WORKOUT	5112202	ANGEL HEART	7956172	ALIEN	0002812
THE NATURAL *	1649132	SINGH' IN THE RAIN	2554552	ROXANNE	1960222
PATTOH	0043332	TNE STING	1005292	OKLANOMAI	0054392
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THE KARATE KID	1710412	TNE BRIDGE OH THE RIVER KWAI	1606302	DUT OF AFRICA	2131162
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THE BIG EASY	6559102	THE LONGEST DAY	0577602	AMADEUS	6529172
THE CARE BEARS MOVIE II	1862132	CLEOPATRA	0579432	HO WAY OUT	6558112
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TNE QUIET MAH	4032122	THE KARATE KID II	1894152	A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET III	3432102
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IRONWEED	4958042	SESAME STREET PRESENTS: FOLLOW THAT BIRD	6117232	STAR TREK III—THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK	2016322
THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS	3652052	THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK	0910412	TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD	1022282
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HELLO, DOLLY	0609472	2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY	0025192	STAKEOUT	5488002
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LA BAMBA	1963032	HOPPE AND GLORY	1251042	ERNEST GOST TO CAMP	5484042
ON GOLDEN POND	0523572	EDDIE MURPHY: RAW	4392082	PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES	4394062
TOP GUN	4269322	PREDATOR	3649012	HARRY AND THE HEHDERSONS	2219032
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS	2026552	TNROW MOMMA FROM THE TRAIN	2351012		
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DEATH WISH 4: THE CRACKDOWN	3449032	BEVERLY HILLS COP II	4319082		
		WALL METAL JACKET	6325052		
		WALL STREET	3661042		

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Check one: ☐ VHS ☐ BETA

Please check how paying:

☐ My check is enclosed.

Q58/Q60

☐ Charge my introductory movies and future Club purchases to:

☐ MasterCard ☐ Diners Club ☐ American Express ☐ VISA

Q59/Q61

Account # _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Name _____ Phone () _____

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Note: CBS Video Club reserves the right to reject any application or cancel any membership. Offer limited to continental U.S. (excluding Alaska) and Canada. Canadian residents will be serviced from V104/F88 (Toronto offer may vary). Applicable sales tax added to all orders.

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Order a sixth movie now for only \$14.95—and your membership obligation is immediately reduced (you then need buy only 5 more, instead of 6).

Just fill in the number of your first selection below, and add \$14.95, plus \$1.75 shipping/handling, to your \$10.00 payment.

#

NEWSBREAKS

HDTV... STILL VIDEOCAMERAS

S-VHS TAPES... E.T. PROTEST

F.Y.I.

8MM VIDEO MAG COMING

SONY IS CO-SPONSORING the introduction of a new business magazine on videocassette. Called *Video Diamond*, it's been developed as software for the 8mm format.

PARTY ANIMALS

ACCORDING TO A POLL conducted by MTV, people aged 18 to 34 are split on the issue of who would throw a better party—Michael Dukakis or George Bush. The Duke, however, was preferred 42% to 27% as a potential cross-country road-trip partner.

FEDS FINGER VID CHAIN

THE PENNSYLVANIA Attorney General's office has accused a Philadelphia-area video chain of re-wrapping old prerecorded tapes and selling them as new. The chain, Movies Unlimited, denied any wrongdoing but paid a \$1,000 civil penalty.

LOOK MA, NO WIRES!

THE FIRST AND ONLY Nintendo-approved wireless remote videogame controller is coming from Acclaim Entertainment. The controller, which will retail for \$39.95, is only 4½ inches wide and weighs 5 ounces.

BIBLE BELLE GOES VIDEO

COMEDIAN/SCREAMER SAM Kinison has given PTL scandal celebrity Jessica Hahn the lead role in his new video version of *Wild Thing*. Also appearing: Billy Idol, Steve Perry, Rodney Dangerfield and all five members of Ratt.

OLYMPICS A TV BUST

NBC, WHICH EXPECTED ITS Summer Olympics broadcasts to turn an \$80 million profit, wound up instead with a "modest" loss due to low ratings. Viewer defections may have resulted from the network's airing of an unprecedented 30 hours of commercials during the games.

MCA PROTEST

EVANGELICALS TAKING AIM AT E.T.

By Richard Huff

Religious groups outraged by MCA/Universal's *The Last Temptation of Christ* plan to stage a boycott of the video release of MCA's *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*.

While the controversial *Temptation* won't be on videocassette until the first quarter of 1989, the National Association of Evangelicals (which represents approximately 50,000 local churches with a membership of about 10 million) and the Southern Baptist Convention are urging their members not to buy or rent *E.T.* as a way of showing their displeasure with MCA. An MCA spokesperson declined comment.

"We are not protesting *E.T.* as a production," says Donald R. Brown, director of information for the NAE. "We asked our members not to purchase *E.T.* to show MCA we did not like its insensitivity with the handling of



Video's Last Temptation: renting E.T.?

The Last Temptation of Christ." Brown is unsure if the protest will be expanded to cover the movie's video release. "We'll wait and see," he says. "We don't know if we want to give more publicity to the film."

Some video retailers have already received letters from consumers asking them not to stock *Temptation*, including New

Jersey's Palmer Video chain. Palmer president Peter Balner shrugs off the protests. "Just because there are a couple of vocal groups out there I am not going to change my buying patterns," he says. As for the *E.T.* boycott, Balner doesn't think that will have much of an effect. So far, the Palmer chain alone has already purchased 33,000 copies.

VIDEO PORTRAITS

STILL VIDEOCAMERAS COMING

By Robert Gerson

It's taken seven long years, but affordable instant still videocameras are finally coming.

First demonstrated by Sony in 1981, still videocameras take color "snapshots" that can be played back on a TV screen. They're stored on a 2-inch magnetic disc that holds either 25 full-field (525-line) or 50 field (262.5-line) pictures.

Now, Canon is entering the market with its RC-250. The camera retails for less

than \$800, which increases to less than \$1,000 with a basic accessory kit.

Meanwhile, in Japan, Fuji Photo has introduced a camera priced at around \$1,300, along with a \$1,500 tabletop player that can add an audio track to the disc. Lower-priced cameras have also

been announced by two other manufacturers—Konica (about \$740) and Sony (about \$520). Unlike the Canon and Fuji models, these require a special adapter for playback, which adds approximately \$225 to the total price.

Other companies that have shown prototypes of still videocameras in the past include Casio, Hitachi, Sanyo, Matsushita, Toshiba and Kodak. Hitachi and Kodak are jointly developing a thermal printer to turn out hard copies from still videodiscs; Polaroid and Toshiba have an instant film printer already on the market.



Canon's RC-250: CD player with a lens?

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For additional information, circle No. 69 on Reader Service Card.

BIG HD-MAC ATTACK

EUREKA! HERE COMES EUROPEAN HDTV!

By Gregory P. Fagan

BRIGHTON, ENGLAND—Participants in Europe's Eureka HDTV project recently displayed their high-definition television system here at the International Broadcasting Convention.

The demonstration took place in a gleaming, high-tech pavilion by the English Channel. Representatives from the Eureka consortium—comprising all of the major European video equipment manufacturers—exhibited components of their HD-MAC high-definition system, including Philips-developed HD-MAC consumer playback equipment (a VHS VCR and a laser videodisc

player for full HDTV playback).

The HD-MAC system delivers a 1,250-line picture in a widescreen (16:9 aspect ratio) format. The crucial distinction between HD-MAC and leading HDTV proposals from the US and Japan is its 50-field-per-second rate of picture display. The US and Japan use a 60-field rate in the current TV system and proposed HDTV systems.

Eureka HDTV involves some 30 companies under the leadership of Philips, Thomson (the French parent of GE-RCA) and Bosch. Beginning late in 1986, the consortium split the development up into 10 separate projects,

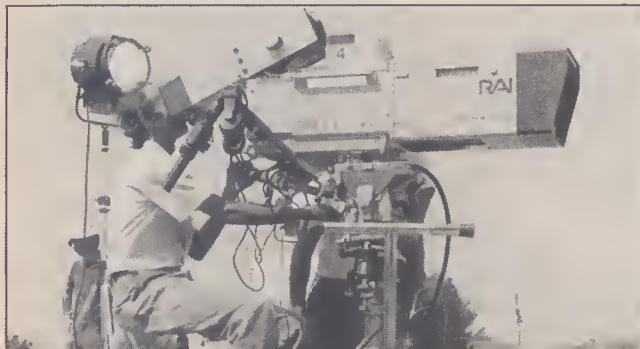


MACVideo: Philips' HDTV VCR.

many of which converged for the first time just weeks before the Brighton exhibition.

HD-MAC is only one of the 213 projects within the Eureka Initiative, which 19 European governments formed in 1985 to pool research and development efforts. The Eureka countries

plan to launch several high-powered satellites in the next few months and begin testing transmissions soon afterward. According to project officials, European consumers should be able to receive HD-MAC programming via DBS (direct broadcast satellite) in early 1992.



Eurekavision: Thomson's HDTV camera.

NHK BLITZ

High Def Hits the Road

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA—Japan's national broadcaster, NHK, took its Hi-Vision high-definition TV show on the road this fall, and while the demonstrations attracted lots of oohs and ahs, NHK won little industry support.

NHK showed its 1,125-line HDTV system here at the posh Hyatt Regency hotel during the Olympics. A projection TV in the hotel lobby displayed live and taped segments of the feed NHK was sending by satellite back to Japan, where its HDTV telecast of the games was available for viewing on several hundred sets set up in public locations.

NHK followed up with a demonstration in Brighton, England, during the International Broadcasting Convention (see accompanying story).

In arguing for Hi-Vision, NHK pointed out that its system is already developed and should be adopted as a worldwide standard. NHK offered to license its Hi-Vision technology to other manufacturers, but reportedly there were no takers.

The lack of interest from South Korean manufacturers stems, in part, from their technology gap. No Korean manufacturer could launch a Hi-Vision effort without increasing dependence on a continued flow of Japanese parts and know-how, something they'd rather not do. Another reason is that the issue of HDTV standardization in the US and Europe, Korea's main export markets, is still unsettled, and the Koreans feel they are not the ones to take a leadership position. (R.G.)

CABLE RENAISSANCE

"FLOP" SHOWS RETURNING

Critically acclaimed but little-watched network TV shows, including new episodes of *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd*, are getting a second chance on cable.

Until recently, a canceled network series either wound up in its creator's closet, or, if enough episodes had already been made, it would be syndicated to independent local stations. Now, cable has become a viable outlet for shows unable to build broad-based audiences.

Molly Dodd, for example, developed a loyal core following and garnered great reviews but failed to deliver the ratings NBC wanted. As a result, the Lifetime network, which targets women viewers, was able to buy the existing 26 half-hour episodes and order 13 new ones.

Since its inception, the cable industry has touted its ability to "narrowcast" quality programming to smaller audiences. Thus, if a cable network can find a program that grabs a demographic group advertisers want to reach, a canceled show can be a cable hit.

Cable has also become a viable rerun outlet for successful network one-hour programs, such as *Miami Vice*, which previously would have been syndicated to independent TV stations. The USA

Network will be the home for reruns of *Miami Vice* and *Murder, She Wrote*, while *Diamonds*, a former late-night entry on CBS, is heading for USA along with 13 new episodes.



Dodd's Blair Brown: returning.

"With Lifetime taking on *Molly Dodd*," says Pat Fili, Lifetime's vice president of programming, "it says to Hollywood that there's another place to sell your shows." Producers concur. "I'm happy to have the opportunity to continue this important series," says *Molly Dodd* creator Jay Tarses. Another of Tarses' series, *The Slap Maxwell Story*, cut from the ABC lineup last year, has been picked up by the Arts and Entertainment Network. (R.H.)



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PHILIPS



View improving: S-VHS On Golden Pond.

SOFTWARE ALERT

S-VHS GETS GOLDEN POND

Will Super VHS have smooth sailing *On Golden Pond*? Super Source Video hopes so. It has licensed the Academy Award winner, starring Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda and Jane Fonda, from J2 Communications as the first major feature for the S-VHS format.

Super Source got started in S-VHS with such mood videos as *Canyon Dreams* and *Worlds Below* as well as a batch of classics including *His Girl Friday*, *A Farewell to Arms* and *A*

Star Is Born. Most of the sales, averaging about 1,000 cassettes a title, have been through direct mail, but Super Source claims a small but eager following among hardware-and-software retailers.

The company thinks *On Golden Pond*, at \$59.95, should widen acceptance enough to win some studio commitments. However, Super Source has already passed on other titles available from J2, among them *The Last Unicorn* and *Inside Moves*. (S.G.)

ALIEN INVADES!

E.T. PRICE DROPPING

By Seth Goldstein

The home video equivalent of a chicken in every pot may be a copy of *E.T.* in every fifth VCR. MCA broke all earthly records with the delivery last month of more than 10 million cassettes of everyone's favorite extraterrestrial (2½ times the total of runner-up *Cinderella*). At last count, VCRs had penetrated about 50 million households.

If not all those tapes wind up on consumers' bookshelves, it won't be because of the price. MCA started *E.T.* at \$24.95, tied in Pepsi for a \$5 rebate and then watched good old American competition take over—retailers big and small chipped away at the suggested list long before *E.T.* ever reached their shelves.

MCA is trying its best to make sure that consumers who buy or rent *E.T.* get the real thing, not an illegal copy run off in the backroom of a video store. The company says it has a variety of

anti-piracy safeguards in place, ranging from Macrovision to a squad of inspectors ready to pounce unannounced on in-store culprits.

ANTI-COPY

VCR-2 at Last?

Go-Video's long-heralded dual-deck VCR-2 may be coming to market with an anti-copy chip.

The Scottsdale, Arizona-based company, which still hasn't found anybody willing to manufacture its VCR-2, says it has developed a system which would automatically shut down recording when it senses that someone is attempting to illegally copy a tape. The firm also claims the recording-disable circuit can be triggered either by its own anti-copy signal or by Macrovision, the anti-piracy tape encoding system now used on many videocassettes. (R.G.)

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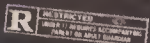


Starring **WILLIAM KATT, ROSALIND CHAD, MARTIN HEWITT,**
WAYNE CRAWFORD, and REB BROWN

Executive Producer **JDEL LEVINE** Written By **GARY THOMPSON**

Produced By **JAY DAVIDSON and WILLIAM FAY**

Directed By **B.J. DAVIS**

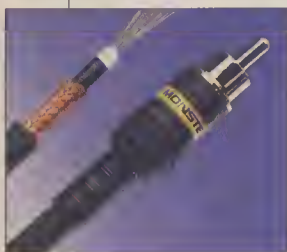


For additional information, circle No. 68 on Reader Service Card.



BE NOT AFRAID

The not-so-scary folks over at Monster Cable take component connections seriously, and this new low-loss video cable is proof. Available in RCA, F-type or BNC versions, the Monster Video 2 (\$14.95 per meter with



RCA connectors) uses copper wire, double shielding and 24K gold-plated ends for maximum signal transfer. A complete A/V cable-connection kit sells for \$29.95. Monster Cable
101 Townsend St.
San Francisco, CA 94107
(415) 777-1355

MIND IF I TAKE YOUR PIXEL?

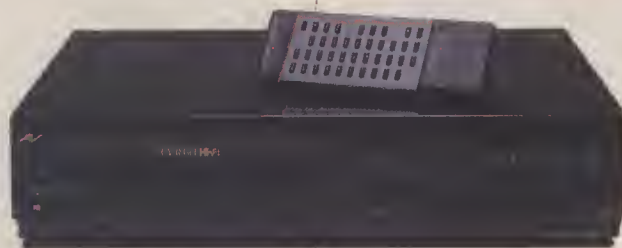
It looks as if we'll be seeing a lot more action on the still videocamera front in '89. At presstime, Canon had just introduced an \$800 version designed for consumer use. At the same time, in Japan, Nikon announced a more sophisticated still video system designed for photojournalists. Fuji, the tape and film manufacturer, also recently bowed a system for capturing stills on video floppy discs.
—Gregory P. Fagan

RCA Monitor/Receiver Model RVM2730 \$899

This 27-inch table model sports RCA's Dimensia label (see "Connoisseur Video," Nov. '88 VR) and includes all of the remote interactive circuitry that goes along with the company's high-powered A/V systems. This allows it to interface with RCA's VCRs via on-screen menus. The MTS-equipped set delivers 525 lines of resolution, thanks to a wideband video amplifier, and includes an S-



connector on its 20-jack rear panel. RCA, 600 N. Sherman Dr. Indianapolis, IN 46201
(317) 267-5000



KENWOOD VHS VCR Model KV-956 \$950

Here's a digital-effects VHS Hi-Fi deck that lets you monitor a TV channel in one-quarter of the screen while a tape plays on the remainder. The 140-channel cable-compatible tuner features an automatic scanning system

that seeks out and memorizes all local channels, while the eight-event/21-day timer operates via remote control. The latching search function works at nine times SP speed. Kenwood
2201 N. Dominguez St.
Long Beach, CA 90810
(213) 639-9000



COMTrex Projection TV Model CVP-300 \$2,995

This portable TV set houses an LCD screen and a projector bulb. Its designers say it can project an image up to 10 feet, and it's available for \$2,295 without TV tuner and tape player. Comtrex, P.O. Box 1450 El Toro, CA 92630
(714) 855-6600

ILLBRUCK Acoustic Panels Sonex Juniors \$54

Audio tends to bounce off bare walls a bit—especially in a surround setup. These wall-mountable, 24-inch square panels can deaden the sound-distorting reverberations and come four to a pack. Illbruck
3800 Washington Ave. N.
Minneapolis, MN 55412
(612) 521-1010



SOUNDESIGN TV Stand Model WC231TP \$99.95

Equipped with built-in 6½-inch speakers, this stand accommodates TVs up to 26 inches on its roughly 33x16 (in inches) platform. Each speaker handles 5 watts of power. Soundesign
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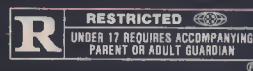
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—Richard Freedman, NEWHOUSE NEWSPAPERS

**ON VIDEOCASSETTE
DECEMBER 29, 1988**



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S-VHS Is Here *To Stay*

Mitsubishi Electric Says Similar to Debut of Color TVs

Truly revolutionary products don't appear very often in the field of consumer electronics, but the new S-VHS video recording format fully merits the acclamation.

your old tapes. To obtain the full benefits of the format, a high-resolution monitor with separate Y (luminance) and C (chrominance) video inputs is required as well as an S-

this increase in the bandwidth that provides the new level of fine detail in the picture. However, greater resolution also invites greater problems from video noise. So, at the same time, the frequency shift is increased from 1MHz to 1.6MHz, assuring a better signal-to-noise ratio.

Mr. T. Yonekawa, manager of the VCR Engineering department at Kyoto Works, explains the principle behind the new format. "Expanding the frequency range greatly increases the amount of data which can be recorded. That means the on-screen resolution can be boosted to more than 400 lines — considerably sharper and finer than the 240 lines of conventional VHS. It's also better than TV broadcast over the air which generally yields only 320 lines."

The three remaining technical innovations contribute greatly to the success of the format as well.

The reduction in Y/C signal crosstalk ensures that the increased resolution does not simply amplify existing picture flaws. It eliminates them. The luminance signal for light and dark and the chrominance signal for color are separated early in the signal chain



"It's a cliché, I know, but you've got to see S-VHS to believe it," said Mr. Y. Ohtani, manager of the Overseas Marketing department at Mitsubishi Electric's expansive Kyoto Works complex. "The first sight of an S-VHS picture is startling. The only way I can describe it is to compare it with the sense of excitement that greeted the first color TV back in the '50s or the introduction of the compact disc. It's really that dramatic!"

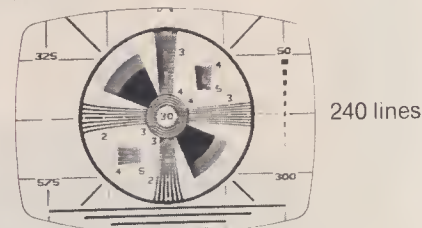
In fact, S-VHS marks the first real improvement in basic VHS specifications since its introduction. S-VHS provides this significant advance in picture quality while maintaining full compatibility with conventional VHS. Standard VHS tapes recorded on older machines can be played on S-VHS decks with no loss in fidelity. So, when you upgrade to an S-VHS deck, you'll still be able to play all

VHS deck. But even with a conventional monitor, the improvements in picture quality are obvious: much greater detail and a sharper image.

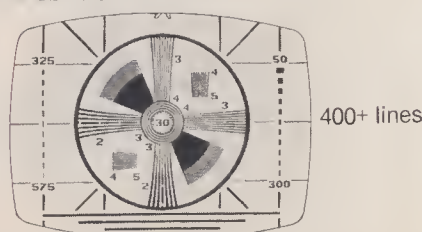
S-VHS is the new industry standard — common to Mitsubishi Electric and several other leading video manufacturers. The superior image is achieved by a combination of several technological advances. These include: increased luminance signal range; reduced Y and C signal crosstalk; a higher grade of magnetic tape; and a narrower video head gap.

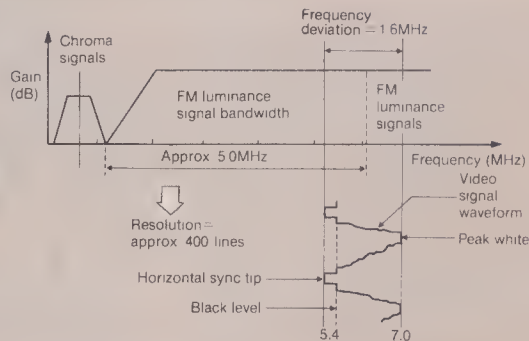
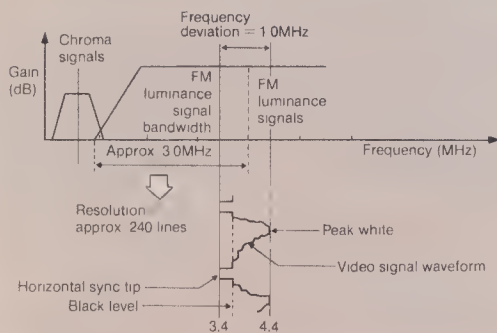
The most important of these innovations is the expanded FM luminance signal. This improves the portion of the signal which defines light and dark — the basic forms you see on the screen. With S-VHS, the white peak carrier for the Y signal is boosted to 7MHz and the frequency band is expanded from the previous 3.4MHz to a dramatic 5.4MHz. It's

VHS Test pattern



S-VHS Test pattern





and processed in electrically isolated circuit blocks. This procedure effectively eliminates interference between Y and C signals — interference which commonly appears as crawling edges, smeared color, and the annoying, color-shimmering effect that makes tweed jackets come alive.

Not surprisingly, the new S-VHS format requires a better grade of tape to carry the additional information. S-VHS tapes are made of the same cobalt-doped ferric oxide as VHS tapes, only the magnetic particles are much finer and more densely distributed through the tape surface. So S-VHS and VHS tapes are nearly interchangeable. S-VHS tapes can be used to record and playback on VHS decks, and VHS tapes can be played on S-VHS machines. However, an ordinary deck cannot reproduce information recorded in the S-VHS format.

In order to record and playback the very high frequencies attained by the new format, the video head gap has been narrowed and refined considerably. These high-precision heads provide a much higher level of sensitivity which results in extended frequency response and enhanced definition.

This family of new technologies offers an altogether more detailed, stable, vivid, and involving video presentation than has ever been possible before in a consumer product. Like the arrival of color TV in the '50s or the VHS format in the '70s, S-VHS is one of those milestones of innovation that completely changes the way we look at home entertainment.

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HS-U80



U70
S VHS

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- FX4+2 Video Head
- Hi-Fi Stereo Sound
- On-Screen Data, Menu & Programming
- Address, Index and Time Searches
- Dimensions (H×W×D): 3-5/16×16-11/16×12-3/16"

HS-U70



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VIDEONICS

COMMERCIALS ON CASSETTE

If you thought video would offer relief from the barrage of commercials, think again.

By David Hajdu

"Diet Pepsi—the one-calorie choice of a new generation." Instinctively, you grab the remote control. You start punching the "arrow" button to change channels. Then it hits you: *Wait a minute! There's not supposed to be a commercial here. This is a videocassette!*

For nearly five years now, commercials of all sorts have been steadily working their way into prerecorded video—the medium that began with the dream of a commercial-free alternative to sponsored TV. First, the studios started tacking previews of their other video releases at the end of movies on cassette. Then a few companies tried moving their coming attractions up before the movie started, an entertaining form of force-feeding that has become virtually standard practice—as well as practice for the ol' fast-forward finger.

But the commercial floodgates really opened last year, when Paramount's *Top Gun* became the first major videocassette release to include a commercial for something other than another cassette (in this case Diet Pepsi, although that ad at least had a test-pilot theme tying it in with the movie). Then came Jeeps on *Platoon*, Nestle candy bars on *Dirty Dancing*, Hershey's Kisses on *The Princess Bride*, more Pepsi on *Innerspace* and Snickers on *Moonstruck*.

Suddenly, it seems, cassettes are filled with commercials. In fact, some recent made-for-video

tapes for kids have finally gone all the way. Like many other toy-based kid-vid releases, a series of tapes called *Dino-Riders* (produced by Tyco) is essentially one big commercial in cartoon form. Fine. But in a shameless stroke of sales trailblazing, the tapes are the first to be riddled with commercials for the manufacturer's toys, interspersed throughout the programs at regular intervals—exactly like the ones on free TV.

Why are ads emerging on video in such force now after so many years of essentially commercial-free cassettes? What's going on behind the scenes that VCR owners don't know about?

Mainly, commercial-free home video is a victim of its own success. Over the past couple of years, it's played an important part in the substantial erosion of the network-TV viewing audience. As a result, product manufacturers that traditionally employed the tube as their primary advertising medium are increasingly on the lookout for alternative ways of promoting their goods. Among the most obvious, of course, is the very medium that snatched their audience: home video.

"Theoretically, at least, people aren't necessarily being exposed to any more commercials," says Joshua Levine, marketing editor of *Adweek* magazine. But, now that

viewers are watching more prerecorded programs and finding commercials in them, he adds, "they're just not getting any less."

For the companies that release video movies, the benefits of commercials on cassette are obvious: They're worth money. In many cases, the deals involved are "tradeouts"—complex power-lunch swaps where, for example, Paramount's *Top Gun* gets promotional plugs on posters and packages in every 7-Eleven and A&P where Pepsi is sold. Pepsi gets its end of the deal every time another VCR plays the Pepsi spot on the *Top Gun* tape. Technically, the arrangement might not involve a conventional cash fee, like that which network-TV advertisers pay for air time. But that *Top Gun* setup is widely estimated to be worth about \$8 million in promotional value to Paramount.

In other (increasingly frequent) instances, advertisers are paying outright for commercial slots on cassettes, as one aspect of complicated cross-promotional deals. Though none of the cassette advertisers to date will confirm the scale of fees involved, Nestle is rumored to have paid Vestron between \$50,000 and \$100,000 for its commercial on *Dirty Dancing*.

What does all this mean to the average movie renter or buyer? Initially, the studios

were touting lower prices as the big payoff for enduring cassette commercials. For example, Paramount released *Top Gun* at \$26.95. Of course,



Illustration: Yvonne Buchanan

A WORD
FROM OUR SPONSOR

From top: Moonstruck's Snicker pitch; Top Gun's Pepsi in space; Dino-Riders sells itself; Dirty Dancing the Nestle way.

Paramount had been an innovator in relatively low cassette pricing since it introduced *An Officer and a Gentleman* at \$29.95 in 1983—without a Pepsi plug. And a commercial is now no guarantee of a lower price; Vestron released *Dirty Dancing*, complete with Nestle ad, at \$89.95 (perhaps occasioning comedian Jay Leno's recent observation that "boy, those cassette prices are really coming down—all the way from \$89.95 to \$89.92").

Theoretically, a lot of the money the tape companies are making by including commercials will come back to consumers one way or another. "Certainly, it's conceivable to opt for discounts on every title with a commercial," says Jon Peisinger, president of Vestron. "But, we do believe in investing in new productions, so the fans of *Dirty Dancing* will be able to get more pleasure next year with *Dirty Dancing II*."

In the meantime, the majority of VCR owners don't seem terribly concerned about the long-term benefits of commercials on cassette; they're more interested in the entertainment value of the tapes they rent right now than the prospect of playing a part in financing *Dirty Dancing XXII*. That's essentially the finding of the chief attitudinal research study on the topic, conducted by Alexander & Associates in June. According to its report, only 24.2% of all US VCR households believe it's "appropriate" to include commercials on cassette. However, the approval ratings rose significantly among viewers who had actually seen two of the major cassettes with commercials circulating at the time of the study (to 35% approval for *Platoon* and 46.1% for *Dirty Dancing*). Moreover, nearly half of the viewers surveyed said they "might enjoy" the commercials themselves if they were "entertaining and different."

Of course, all of that may have been rendered functionally irrelevant by an earlier study, conducted in April by the Fairfield Group. Fairfield's ominous conclusion was that viewers recall commercials on cassette *10 times better* than on conventional TV. As a result, according to the study, videocassettes have the potential to be an advertising medium worth an estimated \$45 million per year.

Like it or not, with numbers like that, the continuing presence of commercials on your favorite tapes is a *fait accompli*. Indeed, commercials are arriving faster than ever. And they will, no doubt, continue to do so—as long as viewers keep responding

with those high "approval ratings" and keep renting those hits—with or without commercials.

So the cassettes of *Moonstruck*, *Dirty Dancing* and a few other movies contain commercials. But the average video store carries literally thousands of feature movies on tape. How many of those thousands of movies could actually include commercial messages?

Almost all of them.

Granted, they're not commercials in the *Top Gun*/Pepsi sense. Instead, they're a more subtle type of commercial message. But every VCR owner is being subjected to these little-known commercial messages on cassette, over and over each week.

They're product plugs—the prominent display of well-known consumer goods snuck into the action of major movies. Ever wonder why the *Three Men with a Baby* happen to drink Seagram's wine coolers rather than soft drinks or beer? Notice all those Marlboros that Lois Lane chain-smokes in the *Superman* pictures? Or the Wheaties Rocky is always wolfing down? Then there are the Nikes in *The Big Chill*, the Carltons in *Splash*, Popov vodka in *Back to the Future*, Budweiser in *The Jewel of the Nile*, Tender Vittles in *Mr. Mom* and dozens of other examples in just about every other big movie made in recent years.

Movie producers tend to take full advantage of the opportunities for product manufacturers to plug their merchandise on screen. In conjunction with agencies dedicated exclusively to this business, producers assess scripts for possible sponsor participation. Then the producers essentially auction off the slots through complicated negotiations that determine the details of the product appearances—much like the planning of conventional TV commercials.

As the home viewer's eyes (and dollars) hang in the balance, the deals are frequently Byzantine. How long will the product appear on screen? How will it be used—"positively," like most plugs, or "negatively," like utilizing a Pepsi bottle as a lethal weapon, as one producer proposed to do? Will there be hands-on interaction with a star? How big a star? Will the name of the product be added to the dialogue?

One major "product placement" company, Creative Film Promotions, employs a specially designed computer program to search scripts for possible plugs. On

"HIDDEN" PRODUCT PLUGS

average, the agency says it will find at least 50 potential opportunities for plugs in a screenplay, such as adding a dresser with the right brand of clock radio and the right cosmetics, whenever a script reads "INTERIOR: BEDROOM." And if there just aren't enough obvious ways to work in plugs, the product placers start brainstorming to rewrite the scripts. "I'm part screenwriter," says placer Larry Dorn. "I'm a creative artist."

Though they don't get screen credit, Dorn and other placers claim responsibili-

ty for devising dozens of feature-movie scenes involving their clients' products. For example, one product placement company, AFP, claims it had a salad-making scene added to *North Dallas Forty*, to promote Bertolli salad oil.

According to the 20th Century-Fox Licensing and Merchandising Corp., the studio arm responsible for Fox's product placement, a studio will charge a fee ranging from about \$20,000 to \$100,000 (or higher) for a product appearance in a major movie. As many as 20, 30 or (occasionally many) more products may be promoted in one production, bringing the dollar value of this little-publicized phenomenon well past the million-dollar level for many movies.

Not all product appearances are the result of such intrigue, however. Some products are selected and paid for, autonomously, by the movie's prop masters. In other cases, merchandise is donated by the manufacturer, providing de facto payment to producers in the form of savings and convenience. (Frequently, in such instances, the donations cover a whole lot more than the on-screen needs, such as when Reese's sent enough boxes of its Pieces to treat the entire cast and crew of *E.T.*, in lieu of cash payment.) When the goods are donated, the only cash transaction is between the manu-

facturer and the product placement agency it hired to get its products in the movies. According to executives at the leading product-placement companies, a typical recent movie contains an estimated 30 to 40 minutes (or more) of screen time including product plugs. That's about a third of the movie allocated to serving two masters: one, the viewers who paid their money to view, rent or buy the movie on cassette; and two, the manufacturers who are trying to get the viewers to spend money to buy the merchandise on screen.

Most often, the products are integrated into movies so organically that few viewers realize they're being fed commercial endorsements, as in the Absolut vodka placed in *St. Elmo's Fire* or the Sharper Image credit card seen in *A View to a Kill*. Occasionally, though, the messages are so obtrusive that they manage to get the critics' aesthetic dander up. Reviewing the Margot Kidder movie *Little Treasure* in *The New York Times*, Vincent Canby wrote, "The containers of Coke don't actually receive more close-ups than Miss Kidder, but their close-ups seem more lingering and loving."

In one extreme case of brazen plugging—Jerry Lewis' 1981 comedy *Hardly Working*—viewers actually wrote letters of complaint to the producer. Perhaps the all-time masterwork of cinema shilling, *Hardly Working* contains several scenes apparently scripted solely to promote Dunkin' Donuts, Kellogg's Raisin Bran, 7Up and other products.

Of course, brand-name products have appeared as props in motion pictures for half a century. Recall, for example, that it was 1945 when Joan Crawford, in *Mildred Pierce*, slugged Jack Daniels with impunity. And audiences' purchasing patterns have always been influenced by the screen. It was 1934 when Clark Gable bared his chest in *It Happened One Night* and, legend has it, almost single-handedly destroyed the T-shirt industry. But it wasn't until five years ago, when Fox became the first studio to establish a formal structure of fees for product appearances, that studios started turning the plugs into big-money deals.

Still, crass as this may appear, the product plug process can add what writer Stephen King refers to as "consumer realism" to a movie. After all, trademarked goods are a legitimate part of American pop culture. And they can be a vivid and vital ingredient in a depiction of our lives, be it in a novel, a play—or a feature movie on videocassette. □



From top: Splash's Tom Hanks with Carltons; Sharper Image in *A View to a Kill*; Jewel of the Nile's Bud's for you; Nike sneakers warm *The Big Chill*.



Turn Raw Footage Into Rare Footage

If you've been looking for a way to make your videos more effective, more special, and uniquely your own, the Panasonic® WJ-MX10 Audio/Video Mixer is just what you've been looking for.

The heart of the MX10 is its digital frame synchronizer. With it, you can mix signals from two VCRs together to create the kind of special effects you've always wanted. In addition, a third source is available for an external key camera.

Dissolves, freeze frames, stroboscopes, mosaics,

superimpositions, seven painting levels, even wipes can be achieved at the touch of a button. And since the MX10 is totally digital, you can mix nonsynchronized video signals from cameras, VCRs and tuners. That makes post production easy. You can even mix four different audio signals.

You can also choose from eight different color backgrounds. And with the optional WV-KB12A Character Generator, you can title your videos with a variety of character styles.

So if you've been looking for a

way to improve the look of your videos, it's easy. Just feast your eyes on the Panasonic MX10.

For more information, call Panasonic Industrial Company at 1-800-553-7222 or contact your local Panasonic Professional/Industrial Video Dealer.

Panasonic
Professional/Industrial Video

BEST PRODUCTS OF THE YEAR

According to industry pundits and Wall Streeters, 1988 was a "flat" year for video. We don't agree. True, VCR sales were down from their rip-roaring heights of two years ago. There were no earth-shattering introductions, no overwhelming trends. But the lack of cataclysmic changes left manufacturers free to concentrate on more important matters, such as improving quality and adding features that satisfy the needs of more demanding buyers. Existing technologies—such as projection TV—got better, while

newer formats—Super VHS, for example—began to reach their true potential.

Our main criterion for choosing the Best Products of 1988

was excellence, plain and simple: that exceptional combination of good design, useful features and sheer performance that separates these winners from the rest of the pack. (This year we've also added three Special Achievement Awards.) Combining hands-on evaluations with, in many cases, APEL test reports, we came up with a roster that speaks for itself.



S-VHS VCR ▲

Mitsubishi HS-U80

The first consumer S-VHS deck with a jog/shuttle wheel—in itself a great boon for editing—this VCR also has an edit monitor feature that freezes the last recorded image in a small inset picture and lets you

cue up the next edit point in another inset. Literally studded with digital features, incorporating a design that houses those features with elegant symmetry and, most important, delivering top-notch S-VHS performance, this deck exemplifies home video refinement. (\$1,699)

VHS CAMCORDER ▼

Olympus S-VHS VX-S405

Digital technology plus the high resolution of S-VHS equals a camcorder that not only gives you access to some genuinely cinematic effects but lets you shoot in almost pitch-dark conditions. Name the feature, this model's got it. And that makes the VX-S405 a virtual treasure chest for the creative home moviemaker. (\$2,500)



PROJECTION TV

Pioneer SD-P502

When people talk about projection sets that look as good as direct-view models, this is what they mean. New video circuitry brings heretofore unseen depth and clarity to the rear-projection picture. Its high resolution will do justice to any video source. (\$4,200)

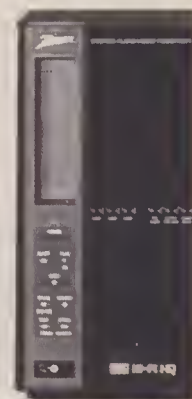


BETA VCR ▲

Sony EDV-9500

We called it "The Ultimate VCR" when we reviewed it last April, and for picture quality this is still the best there is. It packs 500 lines of horizontal resolution into a deck that's more beautifully styled than anyone could reasonably expect. At a retail price of \$3,300,

it's certainly not a mass-market item. In fact, Sony's coined a new term to describe its ED Beta customer: "prosumer." This product places Sony in the forefront of manufacturers that are taking the serious video hobbyist seriously. Products like this one are doing a lot to define where home video is going.



VHS VCR ▲

Zenith VRD530

With all the hoopla over S-VHS, it's easy to forget that VHS is still the overwhelming choice of consumers. This deck helped remind us how good that format can be. Its vertical design makes it a great space-saving deck. Its performance makes it a great deck, period. The VRD530's frequency response measurements were the best APEL tested in 1988 for VHS. With Hi-Fi audio, easy timer programming and a list price of \$899, it's an outstanding value as well.

BEST PRODUCTS



LASER DISC PLAYER ▲

Pioneer CLD-3030

Those great disc special effects you hear so much about were, until this model, only available on software in the CAV (standard play) format. The CLD-3030's digital memory now gives you perfect

freeze-frames, slow-motion and more in the common CLV (extended play) format. The jog/shuttle wheel gives you unprecedented control of these effects, and to top it off, the 3030 also plays CDs and CD-Vs. (\$1,300)



▲ SURROUND SOUND DECODER

Lexicon CP-1

Lexicon's got quite a rep among musicians and studio professionals as a manufacturer par excellence of digital signal processing equipment. Its first consumer product is the only Dolby Surround decoder that's fully digital. The implementation of Dolby Pro Logic (which steers the surround effect with greater accuracy) is also fully digital. The difference? It's there. This decoder re-creates the theatrical surround experience with incredible accuracy and breadth. (\$1,200)

PERSONAL ▲ VIDEO ACCESSORY

Homo Cut 10 Editing Controller

It looks a bit like an old-style calculator, but there's nothing even vaguely quaint about this editing console for 8mm camcorders and VCRs. Playing back, sorting out, choosing the cuts and making a trial run of them—the Cut 10 controls all that and more. The LCD readout keeps you informed of what's going on at all times, reducing the hassle considerably. (\$1,295)



▲ AUDIO-FOR-VIDEO PRODUCT

Toshiba CX3088 Monitor/Receiver with Carver Sonic Holography

Like many of the products we've cited, this model could get an award on looks alone, but it offers a lot more. The TV itself delivers

the kind of excellent picture we expect from Toshiba, but it's the bottom half that really sets the CX3088 apart. That's where the Sonic Holography, created by audio pioneer Bob Carver, resides. Its unique design adds a real kick to TV stereo: As the name implies, the effect is like audio in three dimensions. (\$2,800)



MONITOR RECEIVER ▼

Panasonic Prism CTK-3190S

The highest resolution APEL has ever measured on a home set (640 horizontal lines) fills the 31-inch screen with eye-popping detail. Sophisticated circuitry augments that resolution with sharper focus, whiter whites and blacker blacks. An outstanding set that bodes well for Panasonic's high-end Prism line. (\$2,500)



A/V AMPLIFIER ▼

Yamaha AVX-100U

For \$699, this amp gives you enough inputs and outputs to accommodate the most convoluted audio/video system, including con-

nectors for S-VHS or ED Beta. You also get Dolby Surround and a number of different sound-field effects. You also get a title generator and a video enhancer. You also get... well, you get the idea.



8MM CAMCORDER ▲

Sony CCD-V220

Yes, we know it weighs 7 pounds, as much as many full-size VHS models—and wasn't 8mm supposed to be about portability? Well, yes and no. Seven pounds isn't that heavy (we've been spoiled of late), and this camcorder is so superbly balanced you can't tell anyway. The bottom line is, this is an amazing machine, virtually a mini-video studio in itself. The addition of digital stereo recording is impressive. So is the wide variety of colored wipes and fades. Not to mention the built-in character generator.... (\$2,500)

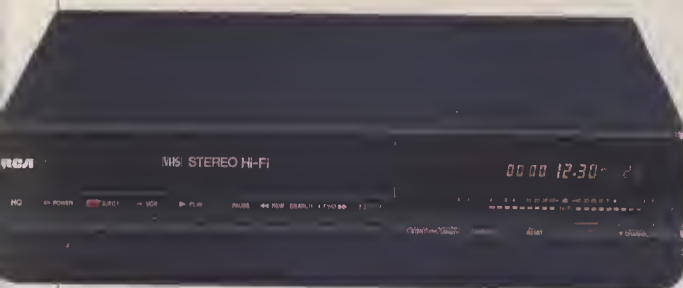


VIDEO PRODUCT ▲

Sony GV-8 Watchman

The 8mm Watchman is a real stroke of genius on Sony's part and may spark a whole new video revolution. About the size of a large trade paperback, the GV-8 merges a full-featured 8mm VCR (complete with TV tuner) and a 3-inch color LCD TV. Social critics may not like the idea of a home entertainment system you can conceal on your person, but even they would agree it's a technological marvel. (\$1,300)

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



CONSUMER VALUE

RCA VR630HF VHS Hi-Fi VCR

Although it's one of the most popular products in history, the just-plain VCR is one of today's best-kept consumer secrets: most buyers don't know what a phenomenal value these decks represent. Look at it this way: The very first videotape recorders were

the size of a banker's desk and cost about 100 grand—in 1956 dollars!

This RCA model typifies the extraordinary value built into today's best midline machines, offering all the recording features an average consumer might need, including on-screen programming and the superb sound of VHS Hi-Fi, all for a very reasonable \$699.



PRODUCT DESIGN

Mitsubishi M-AV1 Home Theater System A/V Receiver

A genuine breakthrough in component integration, the on-screen menu displays of this receiver let you tailor almost every possible picture and sound parameter from

your chair. Too many A/V receivers hide their meager assets with a superficially impressive display of lights and buttons; the MV-1 eschews such pointless smoke-and-mirrors tactics. Ingenious in its logic, the M-AV1 is as well put together inside as it is outside. (\$1,000)



TECHNICAL INNOVATION

Philips 27J245SB Improved Definition Television

Others have tried non-interlace TV before; this Philips set was the

first we saw that did it right. A sharper, brighter picture with barely visible scan lines and no visible artifacts like motion lag and noise. Until HDTV gets into the home, this might be the last real improvement in consumer sets. (\$1,500)



Front Row Center. No crowds. No traffic. No standing in line. Tonight and every night, the best seats in the house are right here. In front of the Pioneer CLD-3030 combination CD/CDV/LaserDisc™ player.

Simply put, LaserDisc players deliver the best picture and sound you can get. The CLD-3030 plays both audio CD's and video laser discs, in all sizes. It also offers you eight different modes to produce spectacular digital video special effects. And choose from a catalog of laser discs ranging from movies to jazz to operas to encyclopedias. All backed by 18 years spent perfecting LaserDisc technology.

Whether it's audio, video or both, the new line of Pioneer LaserDisc players is the only home entertainment source worth staying home for.



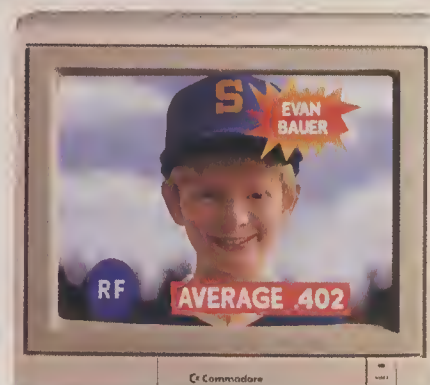
We Bring The Revolution Home.™



FADE IN COMPUTER-GENERATED TEAM LOGOS.



CHECKERBOARD WIPE REVEALS STAR PLAYER.



SUPERIMPOSED TITLES DISPLAY STATISTICS.



COMIC BOOK EFFECT POPS ONTO SCREEN.



ANIMATED BASEBALL FLIES TOWARD VIEWER.



DISSOLVE TO TEAM LOGO AND PENNANT OVER FREEZE FRAME. FADE TO BLACK.

Bring Your Home Videos Into The Big Leagues With The Commodore Amiga 500.

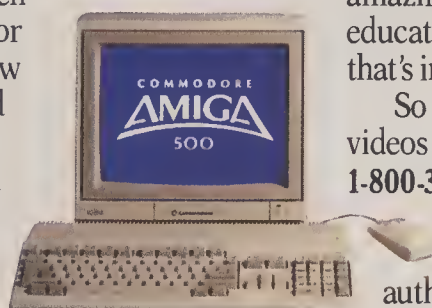
Team up your video system with the Commodore® Amiga 500 home computer, and you've got professional video production power.

The Amiga® has already been used to create special effects for network TV programs. And now you can use its 4096 colors and powerful graphics software to generate 3-D titles...animation—even sophisticated wipes, fades and dissolves. Then superimpose them onto your

videos with an optional genlock device.

But the Amiga 500 gives you much more than video production power. It's a complete home office productivity computer. It plays amazing arcade games. It makes education more fun. All at a price that's in anyone's ballpark.

So step up to big league home videos with the Amiga 500. Call 1-800-343-3000, ext. 300, for more information and the name of your nearest authorized dealer.



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RCA and **Video Review** present

THE GREAT VIDEO REVIEW SHOOTOFF

We're looking for a few good movies—home movies, that is. We know you camcorder users out there have the right stuff where home shooting is concerned. So we're asking *Video Review* readers to send us their best



home movies. Our panel of judges—some of our top movie critics, including Neal Gabler and Jeffrey Lyons—will separate the hits from the flops in four

categories, and we'll award the winners with top video gear and other nifty prizes. Some lucky winners may even see their home footage show up on network television. So, if you think your home movies are good enough for Hollywood, or just good for some laughs, The Great *Video Review* Shootoff is the contest for you. Read on for the complete details.

THE PRIZES

- Our lucky Grand Prize winner will be brought to New York City, where he or she (and the winning tape) will stay at a swank hotel, for a prize ceremony and possible TV appearances. The winner will also receive an RCA Dimensia A/V system, including a 27-inch monitor/receiver, S-VHS VCR, amplifier, cassette deck, CD player, equalizer and speakers—a total package worth approximately \$5,500.

- Four First Prize winners will receive the Videonics DirectED automatic editing console, worth \$499.

- Eight Second Prize winners will receive five Maxell HGX Gold blank tapes and a fabulous "I Was a Contender in The Great *Video Review* Shootoff Contest" T-shirt.



The Big One: RCA's Dimensia A/V system.

- In addition to the prizes, Shootoff winners could also get the pleasure of seeing their creative efforts on TV. *Video Review* is currently making arrangements with several national TV shows to air clips from the winning entries. We will also compile short reels of some of our favorite moments from the winning tapes, which we will make available to local TV stations around the country.



First Prize: DirectED from Videonics.

THE CATEGORIES

To make it simpler for us to judge your movies, we've decided on four basic categories (or genres, if you want to get arty about it) that we want you to work in. So here are the directorial assignments we're offering to all you aspiring auteurs (by the way, the big winner will be chosen regardless of category). If you aren't sure what category your movie belongs in, just pick the one that seems most appropriate. (We reserve the right to reassign movies to categories as we see fit.)

ON THE ROAD

Most home movies of family vacations are duller than watching paint dry. But not the ones *you* will send us. Quite the opposite: Yours are neatly shot and edited, almost mini-documentaries, the vacation tapes your friends and neighbors (not to mention our panel of experts) won't mind sitting through. And if you haven't got a family, don't worry: Any movies related to travel or interesting locales anywhere in the world are acceptable in this category.

F/X

Is it possible to film *Star Wars* in your basement? Maybe not, but many of Hollywood's special effects wizards started out by making movies at home. So who knows? Our winners—working with computer graphics, stop-motion animation or their own innovations—might be the Ray Harryhausens or Douglas Trumbulls of the future. Remember: Any movies that rely heavily on special effects, makeup or unusual shooting or post-production techniques will qualify for this category.

TALES ON TAPE

Here the (screen) play's the thing: fiction movies in any genre—drama, comedy, mystery, horror, music video, etc.—written, directed and performed by *Video Review* readers who make up in imagination what they lack in budget or sophisticated equipment. This category is open to any and all movies based on a fictional idea or situation.

REAL LIFE

Truth, as they say, is stranger than fiction, and if that's true at your house (it certainly is at ours), then here's the category for you: unscripted glimpses of home, family, work and local events as seen through the lenses of our readers.

OFFICIAL RULES

To enter The Great *Video Review* Shootoff home video contest:

1. Submit a videocassette of your movie in any of the following formats: VHS, VHS-C, S-VHS, S-VHS-C, Beta, ED Beta, 8mm. Only one video movie per entrant will be allowed. No entries longer than 15 minutes will be eligible. Shorter entries are encouraged. All cassettes must be labeled with your name, address, phone number and movie title. Include a check or money order for \$5, payable to *Video Review*, as an entry fee.
2. Enclose with each entry the complete official entry form (or copy it onto a plain piece of paper). Entries must be received by January 31, 1989. *Video Review* is not responsible for late, lost or misdirected mail.
3. Only amateur videographers may enter. All professional submissions will be disqualified. All entries must be the work of the entrant. No material previously submitted to other contests or previously broadcast or publicly displayed will be eligible. Entrants are required to attest to compliance with these provisions.
4. All entries become the property of *Video Review*. Finalists may be asked to supply their original source tapes, which will be returned. All other entries cannot be acknowledged or returned. Winners consent to the use of their names and/or entries for advertising, and no compensation will be paid for such use.
5. Entries will be judged by *Video Review* critics on the basis of artistic and technical merit in four categories: **On the Road, F/X, Tales on Tape and Real Life**. *Video Review* will award one Grand Prize to the best overall entry (regardless of category) and four First Prizes, one in each of the above categories. Eight Second Prizes will be awarded to the runners-up. Judges' decisions are final. By entering this contest, each entrant accepts and agrees to be bound by these rules and the decisions of the judges.
6. Winners must be available for promotional appearances.
7. Winners will be notified by mail (no phone calls, please).
8. This contest is open to residents of the United States, except employees (and their families) of *Video Review*, its advertising agencies and RCA. Void where prohibited or restricted by law. All federal, state and local laws apply.
9. For a list of prize winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **The Great *Video Review* Shootoff Winners, *Video Review*, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010.**



THE GREAT VIDEO REVIEW SHOOTOFF

To enter, mail this completed form along with your videocassette entry to:

The Great *Video Review* Shootoff
Video Review
 902 Broadway
 New York, NY 10010

Name _____
 (please print)
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Telephone (area code) _____
 Title of movie _____
 Category (please check) ☐ On the Road ☐ F/X
☐ Tales on Tape ☐ Real Life
 Format _____

Equipment used: camcorder _____
 editing or post-production equipment _____
 other accessories _____
 Comments _____
 I certify that my entry is my original work and I am not a professional videographer.
 Signature _____

(If you need more space, please use an additional piece of paper. Don't forget your \$5 entry fee, payable to *Video Review*.)
 Advertisement

RCA CAMCORDERS. CHOSEN NUMBER ONE IN AMERICA.



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No one on earth has had as long and as loving a relationship with television as Americans.

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its most knowledgeable critics. After all, over time we've developed quite a keen and discriminating eye.

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A fact we're quite proud of. After all, you can't receive higher critical acclaim than that.


RCA



THE WISH



Photos: Deborah Denker

LIST

We're making a list, checking it twice. We've included a bit of everything on this year's holiday wish list: the elegant, the clever, the fun, even a few stocking stuffers. We've also added a page of the tapes and discs we'd most like to find under our tree. So if you're shopping for the videophile who has everything (but still wants more)—or if you are that person—we've got your number.

1. DESKTOP VIDEO: Sony's combination color TV/8mm VCR adds video to the well-stocked power desk. With 5-inch screen, timer and a range of freeze and scan modes, model EV-DT1 (\$1,700) does it all.

2. MAKING MOVIES: Perfect for the moviemaker who doesn't want to throw a lot of weight around, Panasonic's 2 $\frac{7}{10}$ -pound model PV-110 VHS-C camcorder (\$1,450) has index search and a high shutter speed.

3. FOR THE AUDIOPHILE: Bring out your bass with the Octave subwoofer speaker from NHT (\$230), shown here with one of NHT's Model I bookshelf speakers. Together they form a perfect audio-for-video match.

4. LIGHT HIGHLIGHT: Brighten those holiday tapes with a heavy-duty, 110-volt video light with a built-in cooling fan from Asahi (\$180).

5. CORDLESS 'PHONES: Go mobile with Datawave's Private Waves wireless head-phone system (\$89.95). Using RF transmission instead of the usual infrared, the system can send sound through walls at a range of up to 75 feet—perfect for following a football game during a snack run.

6. MIX IT UP: Add narration, music and sound effects to your home movies with Sima's Video SoundMixer (\$79.95). The battery-operated mixer comes with its own microphone.

7. YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL: In one VCR. Stylishly capable, JVC's model HR-S5000U (\$1,299) has Super VHS and full HQ circuitry for better pictures, Hi-Fi for great sound plus indexing and a flying erase head.

8. YOU'RE SURROUNDED: NEC's AV-330 audio/video sound processor (\$449) is a Dolby surround decoder with built-in front and rear amps that make it easy to move up to movie theater sound.

9. GOLDEN AGE OF WIRELESS: Untether joysticking tots from the TV with Camerica's Freedom Stick (\$69.95). This wireless control works with all video game systems and has switches for automatic rapid-fire or manual operation.

10. UNIVERSALLY YOURS: Sometimes being remote is not such a bad thing. Realistic's model 100 infrared remote control (\$99.95) learns the commands of up to eight components.



11. 20/20 VISION: Tired of *Nightline* in B&W? Proton's compact model VM-210 monitor (\$649) makes a sleek MTS stereo set (with optional tuner) for the bedroom. The 20-inch TV includes picture-enhancing circuitry and outputs for optional speakers.

12. LIGHT CAMERA ACTION: Minolta's model 8-8100 8mm camcorder (\$1,915) weighs only 2½ pounds. It features a 6:1 power zoom, automatic focus and high-speed shutter.

13. GET UNWIRED: Recoton's model W100 bookshelf speaker system (\$250) sends high fidelity sound from your A/V system to any room in the house via AC. Just plug them into the wall for power and sound, too.

14. REMOTE RETREAT: Put your remote controls to rest in one attractive, easily located holder. The TV Mate remote caddy (\$24.95) comes in oak or walnut.

15. VOICE LESSONS: Those helpless—and not so helpless—at programming VCRs can do no wrong with the Optonica model VC-G980U VHS Hi-Fi VCR (\$800). A microchip-activated voice in its remote control coaches you through all the steps.

16. THROUGH A LENS CLOSELY: For closer close-ups—even with camcorders that already have zoom, use Spectralstar's telephoto add-on lens (\$159.95). The lightweight lens screws onto the end of almost any camcorder.

17. FOR REAL CHARACTERS: Spice up (or, word up) any home video movie with Panasonic's model PV-G40 character generator (\$220).

18. LIKE THAT MIKE: Canon's model MM-100 mixing microphone (\$150) lets you mix live and recorded sound while you shoot.

19. LIGHT DELIGHT: Reduce graininess and improve contrast in your home movies with Cool-Lux's Micro-Lux light (\$79.95). The 12-volt, battery-operated light weighs 3 ounces and comes with a power pack.

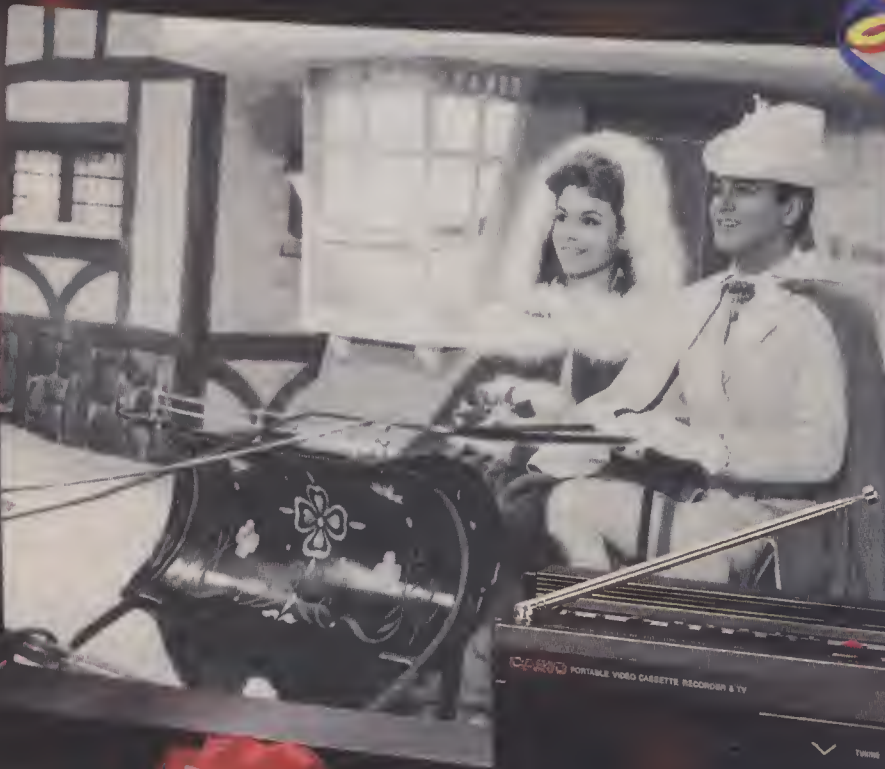
20. F/X FLEX: Ambico's model V-0300 (\$425) combines video and stereo audio from two sources into one smoothly cut production with a wide variety of wipes and fades in many colors.

21. CARRY ON: A portable TV/VHS VCR the size of a portable radio? Casio's model VF-3000 (\$1,399) has a 3⅓/10-inch LCD screen and a TV tuner, yet weighs only 5 pounds. That's entertainment!



Video Review's
HOLIDAY GIFT
Guide

11.



21.

COLOR LIQUID CRYSTAL DISPLAY

VF-3000

Special Effects
Generator
 Model V-0500



COLOR SELECT

RED
 GREEN
 BLUE
 PURPLE
 B&W

PEAK

SOFT

SHARP

STILL

FREEZE

PAUSE

REVERSE

FAST

STOP

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Canon

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MPIC

BEST BUYS, SAFE BETS AND BARGAINS

Video almost makes holiday gift-giving too easy. Winding our way down from the top, Michael Keaton's *Beetlejuice* (\$24.98) opens the door to Warner's new low-priced disc policy—just in time for the holidays.

The gorgeous photography in *National Geographic's The Invisible World* (\$29.95) looks sharper on Image's LV disc.

The Pioneer Artists label offers something for every opera buff on your list, such as Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* (\$54.95).

Nelson marches on with the latest six-tape installment in its *March of Time* series, *The Great Depression* (\$149.88).

The 7-hour Russian version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* by Sergei Bondarchuk comes in a four-tape package (\$99.95) from Kultur.

Give them a gift they can't refuse: Francis Coppola's *The Godfather* (\$29.95) from Paramount.

The eight volumes of *The War Chronicles* (\$119.60) from IVE should keep the history buff on your list entertained all winter long.

Penn & Teller's *Cruel Tricks for Dear Friends* (\$20) from Lorimar is the gift that keeps on giving, and giving it good.

For golfers who can't quite get it right, Paramount offers *Lee Trevino's Priceless Golf Tips* (\$19.95 for each of the three volumes).

CBS/Fox wraps the forceful *Star Wars* trilogy up in a simple, reduced-price (\$89.94) gift pack.

Anglophiles on your list will raise approving eyebrows upon receiving the six-tape *Brideshead Revisited* collection (\$149.70) from Virgin.

Sports Illustrated's Get the Feeling: Power (\$14.99) from HBO comes in handy during halftime at Super Bowl parties.

Giving Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (\$14.95) from MGM/UA to the Grinches on your list might lighten them up a bit.

Giving them MCA's *Super Callanetics* (\$24.95) with fitness whiz Callan Pinckney might lighten them up a bit, too—but in a different way.

Vestron's holiday sale lowers the price of its one-movie industry, *Dirty Dancing*, to \$24.98.

Jimmy Connors: Winning Fundamentals (\$39.98) from Vestron will give young hackers something to think about this winter.

If they're too young for tennis, Lorimar's *Jim Henson Play Along Videos* (\$14.95) offer interactive learning and fun.

E.T. (\$24.95) from MCA and *Cinderella* (\$29.95) from Walt Disney—just in case you forgot this season's two most popular gifts.

Mickey's Magical World (\$14.95) from Walt Disney—just in case you forgot the world's most popular mouse.

And finally, what better way to say "I love you" this holiday season than with *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Epic Begins?* FHE offers it for \$39.95. Cheers!



If all you've got is a CD player, you're short-changing your eyes.

While CD may be the absolute state-of-the-art for your audio senses, it leaves a bit to be desired for your video senses.

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offers 5Hz-20kHz, ± 0.5 dB frequency response with 0.003% THD at 1kHz. Signal-to-noise is a remarkable 97dB. Dynamic range is an equally remarkable 94dB.

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And the video section is enough to bring tears to even the most jaded eyes. Reproducing a razor-sharp 425 lines of horizontal resolution in a world of 250-line VCRs.

The new CDV-1000, in short, now does for both your eyes and ears what conventional CD players did for your ears alone.

All of which leads us to suggest you visit your nearest Yamaha dealer as soon as possible for an eye and ear-opening demonstration of not only the CDV-1000, but the entire Yamaha Digital Home Theatre system, as well.

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Hunting the BIG G

BY GREGORY P. FAGAN

Three years ago, videogames died. But hold that requiem, maestro—they're back, noisier and more difficult to master than ever. Most experts point to improvements in hardware, software and the growing adult audience in explaining this resurrection—though maybe someone simply remembered to hit the start button again.

In 1985, consumers spent an estimated \$100 million on home videogames, which sounds like big bucks, until you consider that the field generated \$3 billion in revenues just three years earlier. Further consider that game-industry executives now expect to pull in over \$2.3 billion this year—and you begin to wonder whether someone is controlling their fortunes with a joystick.

It's not difficult to understand why videogames have bounced back. Thanks to advanced microprocessing, game programmers can now pack graphics, sound and arcade-level complexity into a simple cartridge or disc. If you vaguely recall the blipping monotony of *Pong* or the chomp-'til-you-drop silliness of *Pac-Man*, the complexity of today's games will certainly surprise you—in terms of infatuation and time consumption, mastering a game like *The Legend of Zelda* rivals such projects as finishing a basement or building a dormer.

But it's not just the games that have grown. The variety of control systems and peripheral supplies now available make choosing the game hardware—or "delivery system"—a significant challenge. Dedicated game systems, personal computers, hybrid computer/game setups and even VCR-based games all fit under our videogame umbrella, even though toy and computer stores rarely present them side by side. We'll take a look at the strengths and weaknesses of each system in our hunt and point out some of the

little traps that dot the videogame landscape.

When people talk about home videogames, they usually focus on the dedicated game systems from Atari, Nintendo and Sega (see "The Great Videogame Shoot-out," Dec. '87 *VR*). In fact, these relatively inexpensive systems share many characteristics with the computer systems. All three use software (cartridges, cards and discs) that does not work with the other manufacturers' systems. Understanding why requires a quick refresher in computer basics.

A typical videogame setup includes a set of control "peripherals"—such as joysticks and laser pistols—and a central processing unit (CPU). Hook the CPU and peripherals up to the TV set, plug the software cartridges or cards into the CPU and you're off. (A personal computer basically works the same way—you touch the keyboard, which sends messages to the CPU and tells it how to interact with whatever software program you're using. PCs generally pull ahead of game systems, though, in the memory and adaptability departments.)

CPUs with greater memory capacity, measured in bytes and kilobytes (K), can perform more involved feats. That's why the 64K CPU of the Atari XE (see chart) lets you operate the considerable controls of the *Flight Simulator II*, while the company's original .128K 2600 lets you do little more than move and fire. The XE system's larger processing capacity afforded Atari software designers the opportunity to build more complex software cartridges—too complex, in fact, for the smaller 2600 to operate.

Consider *After Burner*, a Sega software cartridge closely approximating the popular arcade game that uses a whopping 4,000K of memory. Sega's 128K CPU handles such complicated software programs and presents them on the screen with more color (64 dif-

AME



Selecting a videogame system for your home shouldn't be as difficult as slaying a nine-headed monster. But it is.

ferent hues), sounds (plane crashes, missile launches, etc.) and graphic details (nice antennae on that aircraft carrier) than any admiral could hope for. You operate the controls, which tell the Sega CPU how to interpret information from the *After Burner* cartridge, and the resultant aerial dogfight simulations show up on the TV screen.

The engineers who designed both the Nintendo and Sega systems left room for the systems to adapt to more complex computing functions. Nintendo built a 48-pin expansion port into its CPU, while Sega constructed its Master System with more memory than its current software needs. Some of the newer software cartridges incorporate a lithium battery that lets you

discontinue play without having to start from go the next time around.

Atari, meanwhile, actually built the XE system as a hybrid computer/game system. Its keyboard lets you play a few more computer-style games, but it's not really a PC until you add the optional XE floppy disc drive (for about \$100). This drive allows you to run disc-based programs in addition to the XE cartridges. Even then, it's more of a training computer than a tool for budding businesses.

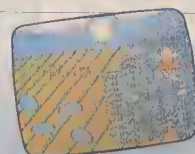
So, we can expect these three systems to survive for a while, and engineers will continue to develop more interesting game cartridges for them. But it appears that such dedicated game systems have established

their place in amusement history alongside such classics as pinball and Skee-Ball. In spite of their scope for improvement, the systems lack the memory capacity and computing speed to handle the interactive role-playing adventure games that PC users have recently embraced. That's not a concern if you simply want to slay dragons and capture gold, but as more powerful PCs enter homes, software engineers will concentrate on programs that take advantage of the advanced hardware. The current Atari, Nintendo and Sega videogame systems won't become dinosaurs overnight, but they will likely lose their leading edge in the electronic fun arena.

Which brings us to personal computers.

THE BIG THREE

COMPANY/ SYSTEM	PRICE	SYSTEMS SOLD IN US	GAMES, ETC., AVAIL.	COOL PERIPHERALS	CPU'S MEMORY CAPACITY	CARTRIDGE MEMORY CAPACITY	UPWARD COMPATIBILITY
Atari/XE	approx. \$150	Info not available	49	The XE system comes with a keyboard and can interface with a disc drive for computer games.	64K	256K	Can upgrade to IBM compatible.
Nintendo/ Home Entertainment System	approx. \$80 to \$150	6 million	90	The top-of-the-line Power system includes a large, interactive control pad that players operate with their feet.	2K	256K+	48-pin expansion port, as yet unused.
Sega/ Master System	approx. \$100 to \$140	.5 million	72	Sega's top system package includes 3-D glasses that currently work with four of the Sega games. (#5 is due this month.)	128K	cards 256K, cartridges 1,048K to 4,000K+	Large memory for future expansion.



Barnyard Buster



John Elway's Quarterback



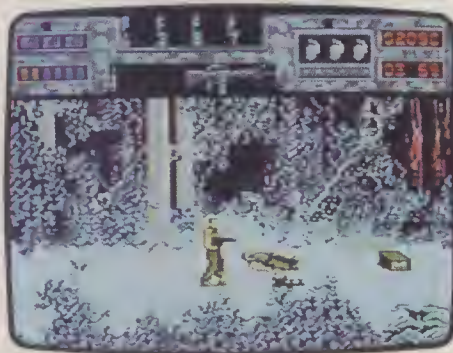
Star Voyager

All data taken from each company's own estimates.

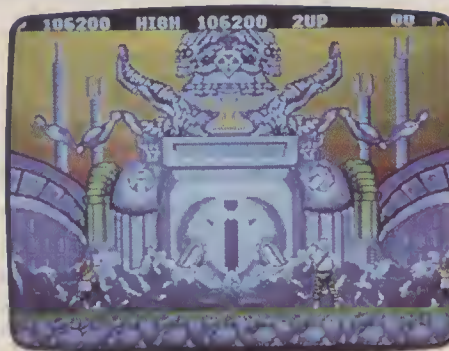


What's in a game? That depends on who makes it, how much memory they pack into it and what version you're playing. Publishers have to translate programs to operate on different PCs.

Pete Rose Pennant Fever (above) from Gamestar and Rampage (right) from Activision are shown in IBM PC-compatible form. The Commodore and Apple versions will differ slightly.



Activision's Predator adapts the Schwarzenegger action flick down to the final confrontation, but it's only available for the Commodore 64/128 series PCs.



Konami's Contra, another guns-in-the-jungle game, works with Commodore's Amiga series. It mirrors the Nintendo version but can pack more of the arcade Contra's memory.

A slew of software companies—or software publishers, as they prefer to be known—design entertainment and educational cartridges that work on the leading home PCs. Some mirror game cartridges that operate on the dedicated systems. Many more, though, exploit the PCs' expanded potential.

Computers in Atari's ST and Commodore's 64/128 series represent a step up from the dedicated game systems. Each of these lets you play games while adding basic word/data processing, desktop publishing and even MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) capability to the package. MIDI allows you to compose and store music programs for playback with MIDI-equipped instruments.

Amiga (by Commodore), IBM PC compatibles (such as Tandy), Apple II and Apple II GS computers are next up on the ladder. Software publishers make entertainment discs for these computer lines, and each system can run similar software to those above. On the top end of the scale, we find IBM XT and AT compatibles as well as Apple's flagship Macintosh. But these last models are big, fast computers that you're not likely to buy for simple game use.

The current dedicated videogame systems won't become dinosaurs overnight, but they will likely lose their leading edge in the electronic-fun arena.

Among the more reasonably priced of these, the Commodore Amiga probably offers the most (beyond games) to videophiles. When the computer is properly connected to an optional genlock device and equipped with graphics software, you can create computer visuals and add them to your home video productions.

When you choose a computer instead of a game system, the standard joysticks and control pads become options. PC-based gaming brings either the keyboard or mouse (a palm-sized peripheral used to move the cursor around the screen) into play.

Not surprisingly, many of the same publishing companies that design software for dedicated systems prepare computer game programs as well. A company called Activision, for example, wrote a number of programs for the Atari 2600 and 7800 game systems. Most are simple. Wiggle the joystick, push the fire button, annihilate the enemy, tell mom you're studying (or the boss you're working).

The same publishing group just came out with a Macintosh program titled *Manhole*, which Activision claims is "the largest entertainment program yet to be released." Using a mouse, you can wander through a

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series of screens populated with a cast of talking animals, aliens and monsters. You decide which way to go: up the beanstalk to the meteor showers of space or down the manhole to a sunken ship. Either way, you have the opportunity to interact with all of the different characters in the program—to fiddle with their radios and TVs, play the piano, etc.

It's easy to see where this technology parts company with the arcade-based games. Arcade owners count on games kids bungle quickly so they can accumulate quarters quicker. Interactive fiction games, like *Manhole*, are designed for hours of continuous play.

Infocom, one of the early PC game pioneers, introduced a similar (though less intricate) series of interactive fiction programs last winter. The company's Infocomics series does for programs like *Manhole* what comic books do for novels. In programs such as *Lane Mastodon vs. the Blubbermen*, you can follow one character along to a point—and then branch off to follow another. The comic-book action, presented with very simple graphics, runs continuously on several levels, so you can spend hours exploring the story. (You can't, alas, order sea monkeys from the back pages.)

Computer systems hold another advantage over dedicated game systems: greater soft-



John Elway plays his Nintendo Quarterback game. As with other endorsed games, the star worked closely with the publishers.

ware crossover. When computer software publishers produce a successful title for IBM compatibles, they go on to translate the program for use with Apple, Commodore and Atari systems. On the game-cartridge end of the business, Nintendo licenses all of its game cartridges on an exclusive basis. This helps with quality control, but also assures that you'll never play any of Sega or Atari's games on a Nintendo system. To paraphrase what we've often noted when discussing video formats, try to know what software (games, etc.) you'll be able to play before laying down the money for a hardware system.

What's the next move for games? Interac-

tive laser technology (see "Laser's Next Frontier," Feb. '88 *VR*). This year, both Pioneer Special Interests and Videodisc Publishing introduced laser disc programs that interface with data on PC-run floppy discs. Pioneer's offerings include art collections and an eight-volume *Encyclopedia of Animals*. In one of the '80s' most ambitious home video packages, Videodisc Publishing collected NASA's extraordinary pictures from the Voyager missions on laserdisc with accompanying descriptions on a two-sided (IBM DOS on A, Apple II on B) floppy disc.

Software publishers are currently exploring the possibilities for games combining these technologies, but they sure won't arrive in time for holiday gift giving. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, the David Sarnoff Labs in New Jersey and the California-based American Interactive Media (AIM) remain at the forefront of this research. Parker Brothers, the people behind *Clue* and *Monopoly*, entered into an agreement with AIM to produce compact disc-interactive (CD-I) game programs, though they've yet to demonstrate their progress.

These games of the future may not reach homes until the mid '90s or later. But that's all right. It will take some of us that long to slay the assorted nine-headed monsters and Ninja warriors that currently sow terror throughout our electronic landscape. □

VCR GAMES: ARE WE OVER BOARD?

Coll it cocooning, coll it vegetating, coll it Avoidance Maneuver #37, but the fact remains: We spend a lot of time around our TV sets and VCRs. Hours each day if you believe expert estimates. That rings bells in the heads of marketing types everywhere: "Let's sell Americans something else to use while they're cocooning!" Ideas like this one gave birth to the VCR game.

Several companies have toyed with VCR games in the past few years. And, despite the underwhelming semisuccess stories of the field's pioneers, others remain eager to keep the tope rolling. Kodak, giant of the photo world and distributor of the *Bill Cosby: 49* videocassette, just introduced its first VCR game, *Robots* (\$34.95). And these aren't just any robots. The titular mechs are Isaac Asimov's *Robots*.

On the game tope, we're treated to an engaging bit of futuristic mystery, all slickly produced with octors, sets and special effects. We follow a detective investigating an attempted murder. He turns to the comero and consults . . . you! You have to finger the felon, and Kodak claims to have designed the game with 256 routes to one truth.

Robots won't be the only new VCR game on the shelves this fall. One of Nintendo's leading game suppliers, Acclaim Entertainment, just released *VCR Wrestlemania* (\$39.95) with the

support of the ubiquitous World Wrestling Federation. You roll the dice, select cords, hit the ploy button and watch short clips of lugs pummeling one another. Guess what they'll do or how they'll do it and win the game. Guess



Kodak's *Robots* VCR game (above and below) resembles a TV whodunit and adds interactivity.



why and win a Harvard MBA.

Another computer software producer, Epyx, offers *VCR Golf*—and for the more ploddingly inclined, *VCR California*. In *Golf* you decide which of four ways to play a hole and then watch your results as the screen splits into quadrants to show all four. *California* involves a race from San Francisco to San Diego. Detour your opponent into the surf—it's only a game.

Nobody expects the classic entertainment of *Monopoly* from the current crop of VCR games, but they all have their moments. Each has been clearly designed to appeal to a specific audience, and in that regard, they're fine. But the limited repeatability of some of the earlier games has kept them from building loyal audiences. (The VCR-based *Clue* game quickly sold a half million copies before sales plummeted.)

The hope for VCR games may lie in the matrix-recorded video system designed for Ideol's line of View-Master interactive toys. With these clever ploythings, on-screen characters actually react to your instructions—thanks to multilayered video signals. An onboard processor selects the appropriate layer based upon which control button you push. Watching this simple yet ingenious system in action, one suspects that the best VCR games are yet to come.

—G.P.F.

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CHRISTMAS VIDEOS



For People Who Think They Hate Christmas Videos

BY ROY HEMMING

No, the choices among holiday-related entertainments aren't limited to the new Bill Murray movie *Scrooged* (ready for theatrical release) nor to the umpteenth TV rerun of Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas" in Holiday Inn—as good as both movies

may be. There's a surprising variety of video programs old and new available to turn even the most jaded VCR owner's holiday-season viewing from one of "Humbug!" to "Ho-ho-ho!" Here's a rundown on some of the best movies and other video



A Christmas Story's Red Ryder fan.

releases (including ballet, opera, carol sing-alongs and vintage TV) that deal with the holidays either in whole or in part—some of them available at special low prices for the current holiday season.

SLEEPER MOVIE

Easily the funniest and most delightful of the lesser-known holiday-related movies is 1983's *A Christmas Story* (MGM/UA cassette, \$19.95), based on a portion of Jean Shepard's book *In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*. Shepard himself narrates the partly autobiographical story about a kid growing up in Chicago during the 1940s who desperately wants a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas—and how this wish affects (often riotously) his relations with his school chums and his parents and eventually even Santa Claus himself. Essentially, it's a kid's-eye view of the holiday season, but it's the sort of movie that kids and grownups can equally enjoy for its unsticky treatment of the story and its contagious good cheer. Darren McGavin, Melinda Dillon and Peter Billingsley head the excellent cast.

MOVIE CLASSIC

No contest here—it's Frank Capra's imperishable *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). But there is a contest over which version—the original black-and-white or the recent colorized version. While I am not

as opposed to the colorization process as are some of my colleagues (and, in fact, am willing to encourage it if it helps to keep certain movies in circulation or permits them to reach audiences color-spooned since childhood), I do object to bad colorization jobs, especially of movies whose B&W cinematography was superb to begin with—and *It's a Wonderful Life* is one of them. This is the movie that still gives sentimental tragicomedy-fantasy a good name—which is no mean achievement. And the fact that the climax of its heart-warming, still-meaningful story takes place on Christmas Eve makes this perfect for holiday viewing, whether for the third or thirtieth time. Since the rights to all but the colorized version (Video Treasures cassette, \$9.98) have fallen into the public domain, there are many B&W video versions in circulation (including cassettes from Fox Hills, Republic, Kartes, Video Yesteryear and Discount Video, all \$19.95 or \$19.98).

COMEDY CLASSIC

Close behind Capra's classic is another long-popular fantasy, *Miracle on 34th Street*, with Edmund Gwenn in the role for which he won a much-deserved Oscar—as Kris Kringle working in Macy's during the holiday season and coming up against a relentlessly disbelieving young girl (a pre-star Natalie Wood). Some of the script tends to the mawkish, but its heart is always in the right place. Once again, there's a colorized version of debatable quality as well as the fine original B&W (CBS/Fox, \$19.98). There's also an interesting musical version from 1973 that usually shows up on TV sometime during the holiday season, with a sadly neglected



The two faces of Auntie Mame: Roz Russell (with words) and Lucille Ball (with words and music) light up like Christmas trees all year long.

gem, "Open Your Eyes and Dream" (by Arthur Siegel and June Carroll), for which show-music fans might want to set their VCR's timer.

MUSICAL CLASSIC

While the 1943 Bing Crosby-Fred Astaire *Holiday Inn* (MCA cassette, \$19.95) and the 1954 Crosby-Danny Kaye *White Christmas* (Paramount cassette, \$19.95; LV disc, \$34.95) have Irving Berlin's greatest holiday songs and many enjoyable musical moments, both movies are also stuck with cliché-ridden plots that seem to get drippier with each new year—as well as with TV overexposure (at least in my part of the country). Much fresher still is Vincente Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis* (MGM/UA cassette, \$19.95), easily the most lilting and entertaining "family" musical of MGM's Golden Age. The story is slight (about three very middle-American sisters growing up in St. Louis at the time of the 1903 World's Fair), but Minnelli garnishes it with some of his most beautiful directorial designs, rhythms and colors. The Christmas sequence is one of the movie's most moving, with Judy Garland's singing of Martin and Blane's plaintive "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" to little Margaret O'Brien being just one of many unforgettable moments. The other nostalgically infectious songs include "The Boy Next

Door" and "Trolley Song." (What's a trolley, you ask? Go to your room!)

MUSICAL PLAY

As the first opera composed specifically for television (1951), Gian-Carlo Menotti's one-act Christmas fable *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (Video Artists International cassette, \$29.95) may well be the single work that keeps Menotti from being just a footnote to this century's music history. In most of his other works (*The Consul* and *The Medium*), Menotti's librettos have outshined his music, but with *Amahl*—inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's painting "The Adoration of the Magi"—everything meshes beautifully. The story may be hokey and sentimental (it's about



Amahl's Wise Men: Nico Castel, Giorgio Tozzi, Willard White.

a crippled young shepherd who is miraculously healed when he offers his only crutch to the Three Wise Men on their way to the manger on Christmas Eve), but Menotti's expressive and melodic score moves everything along irresistibly. So, too, does the first-rate 1978 video version, taped at England's Elmstree Studios (with a few outdoor location shots in Israel). As *Amahl*'s mother, Met Opera soprano Teresa Stratas again proves herself a singing actress with few present-day equals.

Margaret O'Brien and Judy Garland lose (and regain) their holiday spirit, St. Louis style.



CAROLFEST

If you think Christmas carols are meant to be heard and not seen, there's a brief but much-repeatable program of traditional carols that may change your mind. It's titled **The Christmas Carol Video** (Creative Programming Inc. cassette, \$19.95), and it features the Choir of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. There are 14 carols in all, ranging from "Deck the Halls" to "Silent Night." Shots of the choir singing are intercut with close-ups of stained-glass windows, holiday creches, New England snow scenes, the giant Rockefeller Center tree, kids making snowmen and families decorating trees—in other words, a deft mixture of religious and secular images, all beautifully photographed.

VINTAGE TV

You don't have to be over 40 to suspect that TV shows of the '80s don't always stack up to those of earlier years. And more and more evidence of that keeps coming our way through old-time video compilations from small independent companies—even though the source material available to them is not always of the most pristine technical quality. One of my favorites is **Christmas Television Classics** (Shokus cassette, \$17.95), which offers four half-hour B&W shows from the '50s, complete with their original commercials (some of them oddly quaint, some of them cringe-provoking). The prize of this release is a 1953 *Star Performance* play titled "The Gift," starring Charles Boyer, Maureen O'Sullivan and Ann Doran in a tightly constructed drama about a successful stockbroker who belittles the foolishness he thinks the Christmas season brings out in his colleagues until...well, I won't spoil the fun of finding out for yourself. It's a neat little mixture of wit, seriousness and sentimentality, splendidly directed by Robert Aldrich (*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*, *The Dirty Dozen*). There are also two enjoyable, well written, if predictably routine sitcoms from '53 and '56, respectively: Danny Thomas' *Make Room for Daddy*, in which Danny gets stranded out of town on Christmas, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, in which the Nelsons get over-involved in holiday commitments but end up happily (how else?) around the fire with Ricky singing Mel Torme's "Christmas Song." The weakest of the entries is an episode of *Capt. Gallant of the Foreign Legion* from 1954, in which title-hero Buster Crabbe's young nephew (played by his real-life son Cuf-



Santa savers?: Howdy dood it.

Critic's Choice

fy) runs away and gets lost in the desert on Christmas Eve. The dialogue and action on all these shows may be tame by today's more freewheeling standards, but that in itself is somewhat refreshing—at least in small, 30-minute doses. One other vintage-TV release also deserves mention: **Jack Benny, Vol. IV** (Shokus cassette, \$17.95), which includes a choice 30-minute show from 1956 that pits Christmas-shopping Jack against store clerks Mel Blanc and Frank Nelson with unforgettably hilarious results.

VINTAGE DICKENS

Charles Dickens' classic **A Christmas Carol** may have been done to death on radio and television over the years, but you still can't beat a good production for adding just the right heart-warming glow to the holidays. For me, the best production remains the 1951 English-made movie version (United cassette, \$19.95), for its marvelous B&W cinematography and faithfulness to Dickens. It stars the always wonderful Alistair Sim as ol' Scrooge, with a fine cast of English character actors whose faces you'll know if not their names (including Michael Hordern, Mervyn Johns, Kathleen Harrison, Hermione Baddeley, George Cole and a very young pre-*Avengers* Patrick Macnee). An earlier, Hollywood-made version of 1938, with Reginald Owen, also has its moments, and is available in both B&W and colorized editions (MGM/UA cassettes, \$19.95), but avoid most other versions, especially the 1970 musical adaptation titled *Scrooge*.

OUR FAVORITE AUNT

She's **Auntie Mame**, natch, just about *any* season of the year. But Christmas plays an important (and unforgettable) part in her life in the two movie versions that have been made from Patrick Dennis' popular book and play: the straight comedy starring the inimitable Rosalind Russell (Warner cassette, \$69.95) and the overproduced but still enjoyable musical starring Lucille Ball, **Mame** (Warner cassette, \$59.95; LV disc,

Yes, Natalie, there is a Santa Claus—thanks to Edmund Gwenn.



It's a Wonderful Life's dilemma: in original B&W or colorized?

\$39.98). In fact, one of the most delightful moments of the musical version involves Jerry Herman's poignant song "We Need a Little Christmas"—a number that speaks reams about the real spirit of the holiday whatever one's personal circumstances.

DANCE CLASSIC

That, of course, means **The Nutcracker**, the ballet (to music by Tchaikovsky) that has become the holiday dance attraction for both *Continued on page 124*



REVIEWS

LATEST MOVIES



Selleck and a Baby: much more than kootchy-koo and a warm formula.

THREE MEN AND A BABY ★★★

Tom Selleck, Steve Guttenberg, Ted Danson. Directed by Leonard Nimoy. 1987. Rated PG. (Touchstone cassette, 102 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY JEFFREY LYONS

Three Men and a Baby leaves a taste as predictable and warm as a baby's formula. This delightful comedy is based on Coline Serreau's French farce *Three Men and a Cradle*, a 1985 foreign-language Oscar nominee. In this version, three swinging New York bachelors (Selleck, Guttenberg, Danson) live a glamorous life, sharing a somewhat overly showy apartment. While Danson's out of town, a bundle of joy unexpectedly turns up on their doorstep and the remaining two bachelors are forced to care for the baby. In the process, they learn a bit more than they expected about life and about themselves.

The key to this movie is director Nimoy. He knows full well that we, the audience, can easily surmise what will happen once the initial shock of the blessed arrival wears off. The little darling will get hungry, of course, she'll need a diaper change and she'll quickly bring general

chaos to the apartment. But Nimoy tackles that premise perfectly. The guys start out as amiable, frantic klutzes—putting on the wrong size diaper, finding themselves bewildered in the baby-formula section of the supermarket and trying to readjust their ordered, self-centered lives according to the baby's schedule.

Screenwriters James Orr and Jim Cruickshank, who wrote Touchstone's *Tough Guys*, have been able to create believably separate identities for the bachelors so that they really *are* three different sorts of men, though all are faced with the same dilemma.

The movie is not without minor flaws. There's a rather dumb and superfluous subplot involving a drug delivery, which might make many parents hesitate showing the movie to younger children. It gets in the way of the rest of the movie, but it doesn't quite ruin it, thank goodness.

There's a nice cameo by Celeste Holm as Danson's strong-minded mother, who refuses to bail her son and his friends out of their predicament. As for the baby itself, she's played by twins Lisa and Michelle Blair, two of the most adorable children you're likely to see on a screen.

When released theatrically last November, *Three Men and a Baby* became one of the hits of the '87 holiday season, delighting audiences of all ages and dispositions. It should do the same on video this '88 holiday season.

WILLOW ★★★

Val Kilmer, Joanne Whalley, Jean Marsh. Directed by Ron Howard. 1988. Rated PG. (RCA/Columbia cassette, 130 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY LEONARD MALTIN

If you ask me, this movie got a bum rap from most of the critics. The people I know who saw it *liked* it. But a great many reviewers berated it as just a rehash of George Lucas' *Star Wars* formula. I can't really argue the point; they're right. But not all formulas are created equal. After all, many genre pictures use the same exact formula over and over to everyone's delight and satisfaction. Lucas developed an adventure saga formula that worked a decade ago, so why not try it again?

Lucas is no fool. He knew that if he was going to reuse a basic structure, he'd better flesh it out with a lot of new ideas. So, in collaboration with director Ron Howard, he threw in everything but the kitchen sink to make this a rousing, slam-bang entertainment experience.

Willow is the story of a little person who reluctantly sets out on a journey to return

Willow's Marsh: dat ol' black magic.





Colors' Penn and Duvall: up against an ugly and incendiary pack of real-life situations.

an infant to its rightful place and see that it fulfills its destiny. But nothing goes as planned. Our diminutive hero finds himself caught up in an epic-scale, anything-can-happen adventure. Along the way he acquires an unlikely ally named Macmurdian (the Han Solo-type anti-hero, well-played by Kilmer). Ultimately, he learns what evil really is when he witnesses the furious black magic of Queen Baymorda, played with gusto by Marsh.

Willow takes its time getting on the road, but once it's there the pace seldom flags. If anything, it may offer *too* much on its way to that climactic witches' duel. But I don't know what could be cut. The two-headed dragon gave me a real jolt, and so (in a different way) did the toboggan. (Incidentally, the stop-motion animation of Phil Tippett is just as impressive as it was in *RoboCop* last year. I think we're looking at the new Ray Harryhausen.)

So all you curmudgeons, dry up. Sure it would be nice to find something completely fresh, in which one could find no trace of earlier sources or inspirations. But until such a picture comes along, I'll be quite happy with the ample entertainment that *Willow* has to offer.

COLORS ★★★

Sean Penn, Robert Duvall, Maria Conchita Alonso. Directed by Dennis Hopper. 1988. Rated R. (Orion cassette, 127 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY NEAL GABLER

Hopper made his reputation 20 years ago as the star, writer and director of the countercultural hit *Easy Rider*, which romanticized the fatalism of an entire generation. *Colors*, Hopper's first major directorial effort since *Rider*, has also electrified audiences—but in a very different way. Set in the Los Angeles ghettos and painstakingly chronicling gang warfare, *Colors* allegedly triggered warfare of its own among LA teen audiences—which, not incidentally, reaped a whirl-

wind of publicity for the picture. Interested parties began arguing over whether the movie glamorized violence or condemned it. The argument now continues into the video version, which has a few additional minutes of mayhem.

Whatever the controversy, there doesn't seem to me to be much doubt where the picture's sentiments lie. *Colors* is, in fact, a rather old-fashioned, occasionally even moralistic tale of two cops—one young and impulsive (Penn), the other older and more sage (Duvall)—who patrol the ghettos and try to bring order from chaos. The gangs are a death trip, and the only concession Hopper makes is that the community doesn't really afford these bandits an alternative.

There isn't a whole lot of plot here; it's largely Penn and Duvall cruising the streets and harassing errant teens. But the sense of impending doom is palpable and riveting. You know one of them is going to get it. You just keep waiting for the who, the when and the how—and at those moments when the movie does explode, its effect jangles your nerves.

Hopper also camouflages the conventionality of the young cop/old cop material through his reliance on the texture of the ghettos. The streets, dry and weathered, are a silent character. The barrio is like one of those old sleepy Western towns where the citizens laze on the edge of death, and violence is only a word, a gesture, a moment away. Duvall and Penn are both sturdy and satisfying, but there's no way around the fact that on video, even more than in a theater, *Colors* is still only a moderate distance from a superior TV police drama. That so traditional a movie could ignite LA gangs into combat is less, I think, a tribute to the considerable skill with which this movie is made than to how incendiary the real-life situation is.

Former Sneak Previews movie critic Neal Gabler's latest book is An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood (Crown).

THE DEAD ★★★

Anjelica Huston, Donal McCann, Ingrid Craigie. Directed by John Huston. 1987. Rated PG. (Vestron cassette, 82 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98) □

BY ANDREW SARRIS

For the late John Huston, *The Dead*—as adapted by his son, Tony, from James Joyce's beautiful story—was clearly a labor of love. In its theatrical release, this very specialized entertainment garnered excellent notices and a modest art-house audience. Except for a little cramping of Huston's intricate compositions, the video version plays about as well as it did on the theatrical screen, which is to say that it is more highbrow than high-concept in its appeal.

The "plot" takes a long time getting going, but when it does, Irish stage actor McCann provides a superb reading of Joyce's eloquent prose meditation on the living and the dead under an Irish snowfall. But the effect of the ending is more literary than dramatic.

Anjelica Huston is slightly miscast as the "country" wife who eventually reveals to her husband the pitiful secret of her first lover. Most of the movie, however, is taken up with a mystifying musicale given by two elderly music teachers for more



Anjelica Huston: a secret exposed.

than a dozen dramatically undeveloped guests who give us only fleeting glimpses of their inner lives.

If one can settle back and anticipate very little in the way of decisive action, then one may find a certain pleasure in Huston's affectionate treatment of his characters and of Irish traits generally. His evocation of Ireland is masterly, though hardly penetrating. In the final analysis, *The Dead* succeeds or fails as a cultivated mood piece, nothing more. The truly discerning collector or viewer could do a lot worse.



KP Blues for Broderick and GI pals.

BILOXI BLUES ★★★

Matthew Broderick, Christopher Walken, Casey Siemaszko. Directed by Mike Nichols. 1988. Rated PG-13. (MCA cassette, 105 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95)

BY MOLLY HASKELL

Following *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and preceding the as-yet-unfilmed *Broadway Bound*, this is the second installment in Neil Simon's autobiographical trilogy concerning the adventures of Simon's alter ego, the embryonic playwright Jerome. This time we find Jerome undergoing the obligatory rite of passage for a '40s youth—Army basic training—in a movie that is surprisingly delicate and fresh in its handling of a familiar theme.

Directed with exquisite timing by Nichols and starring Broderick, who has come to inhabit the role of Jerome like a second skin, the movie derives its comic buoyancy from a series of cultural shocks as Jerome encounters not only the melting pot eccentricities of his own platoon, but the '40s South in all its florid otherness.

In filtering his characters through the mythologizing sensibility of Jerome, Simon has allowed himself the poetic license of making the characters more articulate than the usual grunting recruits and one-note officers of war movies (and reality). The unending power struggles—over freedom and discipline or over the Army cuisine—are less bullishly confrontational than wryly affectionate. Indicative of the anti-cliche approach is Walken's wonderfully ambiguous drill sergeant. This is not the fohorn tyrant who yells and yells and then yells some more, but a quietly neurotic figure, full of guile and capable of intriguingly twisted logical refinements.

The growing understanding among the young men, particularly Jerome's discovery and acceptance of a fellow Jew's

Molly Haskell is also a critic for *Vogue* and author of *Women in Film: From Reverence to Rape*.

homosexuality, constitute the richest and subtlest scenes in the movie. But the obligatory sexual initiation with the town whore remains mired in the Mississippi mud, one of those painfully raw experiences that eludes the playwright's transfiguring powers.

There is an inevitable theatricality in Simon's movies—they are all, in a sense, Broadway-born and Broadway-bound—as if life were presenting itself selectively and pointedly as a learning experience rather than being met head-on in all its confusing messiness. But, as Jerome's voice-over coda makes clear, the Army experience is being revisited not in its bruising reality but as an enchanted moment, when simply being young together casts its own mood of enchantment.

This is Simon at his beguiling best—sentimental, funny, his modest aims perfectly fulfilled.



STAND AND DELIVER ★★★

Lou Diamond Phillips, Edward James Olmos, Rosana de Soto, Andy Garcia. Directed by Ramon Menendez. 1988. Rated PG. (Warner cassette, 103 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95, LV disc, \$24.98) □

BY JEFFREY LYONS

True-to-life biographies about noble people too often turn into "good for you" movies that run the risk of deifying their subjects while boring their audiences. But *Stand and Deliver*, a remarkable movie about a remarkable teacher, avoids that. It is a totally entertaining and inspiring story of a man of great courage and wisdom.

In 1982, Jaime Escalante gave up a promising career in the lucrative computer industry to teach at a rough inner-city school in the heart of East Los Angeles. When he arrived at Garfield High, the coaches were teaching math and there wasn't a computer terminal to be found. But he didn't give up. Instead, he convinced a small group of students not only to stay in school and rededicate themselves but also to tackle one of the most challenging subjects in the curriculum: advanced calculus. And so began an in-

credible series of educational triumphs that saw every one of Escalante's students pass a rigorous college-credit calculus examination that many students fail.

This is not your usual trite story of students who, after initial reluctance, put their collective noses to the grindstone and through hard work and dedication emerge triumphant. It turned out that the Educational Testing Service invalidated the kids' scores, since it had no logical explanation how a barrio school, in danger of losing its academic accreditation, could suddenly produce a score of calculus geniuses. Thus the drama unfolds, and Olmos has almost literally to fight for his students to get them a fair shake.

Olmos (of *Miami Vice*) turns in a fine performance as the stoop-shouldered, middle-aged Escalante. You'll hardly recognize the actor as he transforms into the most inspiring figure these barrio children would ever meet. One by one, they're won over and soon begin to master calculus, attaining an enormous degree of self-esteem in the process.

What saves this from being simply a pious depiction of a great man is that the movie, under Menendez' impeccable direction, is careful to depict all of Escalante's flaws. He's sometimes too short with his students, for instance, and he seems to relish pushing them to their absolute limits.

Phillips, fresh from portraying Ritchie Valens in *La Bamba*, is the most noticeable of the students, heading a class comprised in part by non-professional actors and real students, who turn in thoroughly convincing performances. Garcia does a nice turn in a small role as a skeptical examiner.

But the movie belongs to Olmos—so good, you may recall, in *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* and *Zoot Suit*. By the end of this very special movie, for which Olmos is an almost sure-fire Oscar contender, you'll feel as if you've gone through the trial and error of the classroom, struggled and triumphed along with these students who discovered potential they never knew they had.

Olmos: pushing to absolute limits.



ABOUT THESE REVIEWS

To parallel the viewing environment of most home viewers, VR critics normally review programs in their homes. Unless otherwise indicated: all tapes are SP; all LV discs are EP. All programs are in color unless marked B&W. □ indicates closed captions for the hearing-impaired; DS indicates Dolby Surround sound.

- ★ ★ ★ ★ OUTSTANDING
- ★ ★ ★ GOOD
- ★ ★ AVERAGE
- ★ BELOW AVERAGE

A TIME OF DESTINY ★★

William Hurt, Timothy Hutton, Melissa Leo, Stockard Channing. Directed by Gregory Nava. 1988. Rated PG-13. (Nelson cassette, 117 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98)

BY JOANNA LANGFIELD

It was a dark and stormy night. After eating dinner with what looks like a big, tightly knit family, Jo sneaks away with Jack, her soldier boy, home on leave during World War II. They elope, but word leaks back to Jo's father, who is devastated. He confronts the girl and pulls her out of her honeymoon suite. Then, while driving her back home, his car careens into a raging river. Jo survives, but Papa dies and his black-sheep son Martin vows revenge. Off we go, on a whirlwind of wild and manic events, as the brother (Hurt) stalks the brother-in-law (Hutton) he has never met.

Boldly directed by Nava, this is a drama that is proud of its more than melodramatic tendencies. Artful photography and lots of violins define the mood. And the story sets the good Jack vs. the evil Martin in more matches than even J.R. and Bobby have endured in a decade of *Dallas*.

Forceful performances help to keep us hanging in there, even when we begin to



Hurt: On Destiny's wrong side?

get weary of all the emotion. Hutton and newcomer Leo are wide-eyed and lovely as the heroic couple in the middle of the mess, and Channing is nicely understated as Leo's understanding sister. Hurt begins the picture bringing a compelling and cleareyed power to the hotheaded Martin but, as the plot winds tighter around the psychological twists of his character, Hurt's control unravels. He gives us too many crazy looks, and he even twitches.

Once Hurt gives up, so do we. Eventually, we just don't care about Martin's struggle anymore. By the end of this near-

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SLEEPER OF THE MONTH

Dafoe as a crime fighter in the 'Nam killing fields: ironies amid the mystery.



OFF LIMITS ★★

Willem Dafoe, Gregory Hines, Fred Ward, Amanda Pays, Scott Glenn. Directed by Christopher Crowe. 1988. Rated R. (CBS/Fox cassette, 102 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.98) □

BY ANDREW SARRIS

In Crowe's *Off Limits*, Dafoe and Hines are cast as MPs searching for a serial murderer of prostitutes in wartorn Vietnam. The absurdist implications of criminal detection in the killing fields are not passed over lightly. By the time all the slaughter is done, the audience is conditioned retroactively to want to get the hell out of that country. Dafoe and Hines reach such a ridiculous stage of political disenchantment that they venture into a Viet Cong stronghold to interrogate a crucial witness who will finger an American officer as the evil cuprit.

Convenient second-guessing and a persistently screechy rawness aside, *Off*

Limits has its moments of hallucinatory effectiveness as Dafoe and Hines traverse the meanest streets on the planet. Unfortunately, their characters lead lives that are much too charmed by far—and too much time is wasted on a coy, sappy subplot about a dedicated nun (*Max Headroom's* Pays) who does not hesitate to go into strip joints to do her social work. Taking up much of the slack are Ward and Glenn as officers who have been in Vietnam long enough to let it get to them.

Off Limits is a much more oblique and modest buddy-buddy treatment of the Vietnam experience than such comparatively frontal assaults as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Platoon*. But the very unpretentiousness of the mystery genre format enables the movie to sneak up on you with its political message without being strident about it. A real sleeper, and worth catching in its video version if you missed it theatrically, and odds are you probably did.

ly two-hour movie, we're rooting for him to just self-destruct and leave these two nice kids alone, already.

A Time of Destiny flopped at the boxoffice, but it's not without its merits. You could do worse than take it home for a night when there's no other prime-time soap opera on TV.



THE GRAND HIGHWAY (LE GRAND CHEMIN) ★★

Richard Bohringer, Anemone, Antoine Hubert, Vanessa Guedj. Directed by Jean-Loup Hubert. 1987. Not rated. (Pacific Arts cassette, 108 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95)

BY ANDREW SARRIS

Hubert's *The Grand Highway* has been described by one wag as *My Life as a Rabbit*, referring simultaneously to the pet rabbit of the child protagonist (Hubert) and the highly regarded movie about childhood traumas, the Swedish-made *My*

Life as a Dog. Both tales feature an initially shy little boy thrust into an unfamiliar environment where he is befriended by a tomboyish girl and gradually drawn out of his emotional shell. Where the two movies diverge is in the greater weight given in *The Grand Highway* to the mysterious problems of the adult couple (Anemone, Bohringer) who serve as the child's temporary guardians. The French are old hands at dramatizing the plight of precocious children lacking in the necessary nurturing, and, indeed, there are traces of the classic *Forbidden Games* in this very manipulative movie.

Still, the very talented players do manage to surmount the conventions of the genre more often than not. Though *The Grand Highway* never achieves either the poignancy or humor of *My Life as a Dog*, it is an above-average entertainment and worth a look on videocassette for its not infrequent privileged moments of childhood's awakening to the bewildering rituals of the grownups.



Alley, Berenger: out for the Kill.

SHOOT TO KILL ★★ ★

Sidney Poitier, Tom Berenger, Kirstie Alley, Clancy Brown. Directed by Roger Spottiswoode. 1988. Rated R. (Touchstone cassette, 109 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95) □

BY ANDREW SARRIS

As buddy-buddy/chase-and-shoot movie thrillers go, *Shoot to Kill* is one of the most spectacularly scenic of the bunch. Much of the action takes place in the breathtakingly beautiful mountains of the Pacific Northwest. All the elements of nature are eventually wedged into the plot, which achieves its final climax in an underwater shootout.

Poitier as an urban FBI agent and Berenger as a mountain hermit are thrown together in the wilds in search of a murderous jewel thief (Brown) and his female trail-guide hostage (Alley). At first, the two pursuers yell at each other a lot, as if to dispel any notion of the homoerotic attraction inescapably built into most buddy-buddy romances. There are also the added *frissons* of city-country and black-white tensions. Ultimately, the sentimentality of male bonding prevails over the token boy-girl relationship of Berenger and Alley.

Director Spottiswoode displays a flair for crisply edited and inventively designed gunfights that should keep most viewers on the edge of their seats. The Poitier character takes quite a beating during the frustrating pursuit of an almost magically resourceful felon. But he gets his man in the end with a bloodthirsty procedure you won't find in an FBI instruction manual. The movie has a little fun

Andrew Sarris is also movie critic for *The Village Voice*, professor of film at Columbia University and author of numerous books on filmmakers and movie history.

with its *Dirty Harry* antecedents by casting Andrew Robinson (the hissable villain of the Clint Eastwood classics) as a red herring who gets flung over a cliff by the real killer.

To her credit, Alley is refreshingly spunky and coolheaded as the hostage, which makes us hate the villain even more. By the time Poitier and Berenger catch up with him, the audience is ready for something special in the way of retribution, and the movie does not disappoint. Hardly an enduring classic, *Shoot to Kill* fully lives up to its violent and vengeful title.



ANNA ★★ ★

Sally Kirkland, Paulina Porizkova, Robert Fields, Stefan Schnabel. Directed by Yurek Bogayevicz. 1987. Rated PG-13. (Vestron cassette, 101 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.98; Image LV disc, \$36.95)

BY HOWARD KISSEL

If it hadn't been based on an actual story, *Anna* might seem like a latter-day *All About Eve* with Czech emigre overtones. The story concerns a middle-aged actress who was a famous movie star when she was young in Czechoslovakia and who fled to America in the aftermath of 1968. Here she is unknown, unappreciated and largely unemployed.

When a much younger Czech emigre, a fan of hers back home, arrives, Anna sees



Oscar-nominee Kirkland: Czech-mated.

her as a sign of impending good luck. But very quickly the younger woman appropriates Anna's sometime lover, her career, even her life story, which she embroilers as her own on a TV talk show.

Director Bogayevicz can't seem to decide if he wants to tell the story ironically or

Howard Kissel is also a critic for the *New York Daily News*.

earnestly, and so the movie veers uneasily from one mood to another. Because of this ambivalence, Anna is never a fully sympathetic character, though Kirkland gives an affecting performance, one that earned her an '87 Oscar nomination.

Porizkova, who plays the fan turned star, is a lovely actress, winning despite her aggressiveness. Fields is suitably neurotic in the thankless role of the lover who transfers his allegiance to the younger woman. There is a particularly touching scene between Kirkland and an elderly Czech trying to persuade her to return home, perfectly played by veteran actor-director Schnabel.

What gives the movie some distinction is the cinematography of Bobby Bukowski, starting from the haunting way he shows us Paulina reflected in puddles, her unmistakably Eastern European silhouette sharing the watery surface with glimpses of Manhattan. Throughout, he achieves a poetry the script too often misses.



STARS AND BARS ★

Daniel Day Lewis, Joan Cusak, Keith David, Spalding Gray, Will Patton. Directed by Pat O'Connor. 1988. Rated R. (RCA/Columbia cassette, 99 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$79.95)

BY NEAL GABLER

One of the first things British producer David Puttman inaugurated during his brief and stormy tenure as chief of Columbia Pictures was a program to give young directors their head in Hollywood without the old commercial restraints. *Stars and Bars*, written by acclaimed British novelist William Boyd and directed by Irishman Pat O'Connor, is an early product of the experiment. Sad to say, it's nearly a complete fizzle.

Starring Daniel Day Lewis (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*) as an English art historian seeking to change his life in America, *Stars and Bars* is apparently intended as another European view of American manners and mores—a fresh comic eye re-examining our landscape. In theory, of course, outsiders can re-imagine us and discover what we ourselves have lost. But O'Connor, whose *Cal* was a moody whisper of a movie about conflict in his native Ireland, has very little feel for the rhythms, the fillips, the real peculiarities and strengths of this country. In his jaundiced eye we're a bunch of grotesques: greedy, feeble-minded, cruel and bizarre. When Lewis goes South to fetch a masterpiece from a faded patriarch, we get a Gothic so extreme that *Baby Doll* seems like *cinema verite* by comparison.

Stars and Bars tosses its darts at virtually every obvious target. Most go wobbling past anything recognizable or truthful.

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THE WRONG GUYS ★

Louie Anderson, Richard Lewis, Richard Belzer, John Goodman. Directed by Danny Bilson. 1988. Rated PG. (New World cassette, 86 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95)

BY JOANNA LANGFIELD

There's a reason this one didn't make it in the theaters: It just isn't funny.

Anderson is the cog in this bumpy wheel. He calls a reunion of his old cub-scout troop, a group of nuts who are just as inept and zany as they were 25 years ago. There's Belzer (the characters are named after the actors who play them, which is either a very hip device or a lazy one), designer of Belzer belts and a real ladykiller; Anderson, a kind of tubby sad guy; Lewis, a successful, neurotic dentist who rants and raves just like Richard Lewis the hysterical, neurotic comic. Franklyn Ajaye and Tim Thomerson round out the group and off they go, camping in the woods. But there's yet another gang on the mountain: some felons on the lam, led by Goodman—and, well, you can imagine what happens when they meet.

It's hard to tell just who exactly the wrongest guys are. Could be the scriptwriters or could be director Bilson. Even potentially comic scenes are grounded because Bilson hardly ever moves his camera—or his actors, for that matter. People stand around like some kind of paralysis has set in. Or is that just boredom?

But if there's nothing else for a rental on some dark and stormy night, don't despair. There are a few bright spots along the way, thanks to Goodman, who is on target (as always) as the bad guy, and Lewis, who proves he is funny enough to survive anything.

FUNNY FARM ★

Chevy Chase, Madolyn Smith, Jack Gilpin. Directed by George Roy Hill. 1988. Rated PG. (Warner cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 101 min., \$89.95) □

BY STEVE SCHNEIDER

Pity poor Chevy Chase. Just think how hard it must be for him to rationalize making so much money for starring in movies as lumbering and ineffectual as this one.

Here he plays a Manhattan sportswriter who moves with his wife to the bucolic bounty of the country, hoping to produce a novel and some offspring. Of course, his escapist dream becomes a rustic nightmare as the gorgeous countryside erupts with mosquitoes and snakes and the local

Steve Schneider has also written on movies, TV and video for The New York Times and The Village Voice.



Funny Farm's Chase: swapping urban madness for a rustic nightmare.

rubes' simplicity is shown to mask orneriness and stupidity.

It's surprising that the usually deft Hill (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Sting*) turned this old-as-the-hills storyline into such an elephant. Narrative tension is virtually nonexistent. The disasters that befall the displaced couple are presented as episodic and isolated, never developing the sense of progressive engulfment that might bring the movie a measure of momentum. Chase displays the same slow-witted naivete that so vexes him in his new neighbors. Smith, who resembles a kind of ethnic reinterpretation of Christine Lahti, is rarely more than functional.

There are a few effective gags sprinkled through the script, but they are routinely executed with the kind of doltish largeness that has become the lamentable trademark of the Chase-Murray-Aykroyd school. On video at home, they seem even more obvious and overly broad than in a theater. Likewise, the movie's shots of rustic grandeur become postcardlike when reduced. *Funny Farm* does contain a few funny moments, but perhaps the most fun comes in imagining how Chase would have skewered a movie like this back on *Saturday Night Live*.

SUNSET ★

Bruce Willis, James Garner, Mariel Hemingway, Malcolm McDowell. Directed by Blake Edwards. 1988. Rated R. (RCA/Columbia cassette, 107 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY ED HULSE

Watching *Sunset* strengthened my long-held view that Blake Edwards should not be allowed within two miles of a movie-camera. The guy's lost whatever spark he had. Virtually every picture he's made in the last decade has either been screamingly unfunny (the comedies) or deadeningly

self-indulgent (the dramas).

His latest is a lackluster cross-genre piece that fails whether viewed as comedy or mystery. More's the pity, too, because the basic conceit held great promise: In 1929, legendary cowboy star Tom Mix (Willis) films a bio-pic of frontier marshal Wyatt Earp (Garner), who's brought to Hollywood as the project's technical advisor. A plea for help from one of Earp's old acquaintances draws the former lawman and his new movie-star buddy into a murder mystery that threatens to blow the lid off an old Tinseltown scandal.

Sunset ends with more questions than answers. Why, for example, build a story around real people Mix and Earp and then totally fabricate their characters with no regard for the facts—especially since their real lives would've made great movie material? Why attempt to limn a peculiar friendship between the two, stressing their similarities of character despite widely varying backgrounds, only to abandon that approach for a weak, muddled narrative? Why stage the movie's climax at the first Academy Awards ceremony—a well-documented moment in Hollywood's history—and then blithely disregard what transpired that evening?

Not that plot and character are the only shortcomings. *Sunset* suffers from atrocious casting in crucial roles. Willis is all out to sea as the flamboyant Mix, apparently unsure whether to play the star as charismatic showman (which the real Mix was) or as overage bad boy playing cowboys and Indians. Hemingway is hopelessly inadequate as a Hollywood hostess whose true identity holds a key to the mystery's solution. But Kathleen Quinlan is both charming and funny as a studio press agent, though she's criminally wasted in a small and thankless part. And Garner is Garner.

Previews editor Ed Hulse is former host of TV's Movie Mania.

THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN INVINCIBLE ★★

Alan Arkin, Christopher Lee, Kate Fitzpatrick, Michael Pate. Directed by Philippe Mora. 1983. Rated PG-13. (Magnum cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

BY ED HULSE

Uh-oh. The malevolent Mr. Midnight (Lee) has snatched the top-secret hypno-ray machine and plans to use it for some diabolical scheme. Who can stop him, you ask? Why, none other than that legend in leotards, Captain Invincible, of course. If he can be found, that is. Ol' Cap disappeared years ago after being accused of Communist sympathies by Washington witch hunters.

Despite a misguided attempt to replicate a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* ambiance by shoehorning several songs into the narrative (written by *Rocky Horror*'s composers), *Captain Invincible* comes off as a charming, likable superhero spoof that never wholly succeeds but contains enough funny moments to be worth a rental.

This is due largely to Arkin, who plays the Caped Contender (as he's called) quite engagingly, milking his fish-out-of-water comic situations for all they're worth. I particularly love the scene in which Cap pegs an ersatz Jewish deli owner as one of the baddies because the miscreant puts mayonnaise on a corned beef sandwich.

Nothing, unfortunately, equals the movie's first sequence: a lengthy montage of tricked-up newsreel bits tracing the Captain's career, his testimony before McCarthy and his subsequent self-imposed exile. It's very cleverly done and very funny. Too bad the rest of the picture isn't in the same league.

BIG TOP PEE-WEE ★★

Pee-wee Herman, Kris Kristofferson, Valeria Golino. Directed by Randal Kleiser. 1988. Rated PG. (Paramount cassette, 86 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY MARK TROST

Has success spoiled Pee-wee Herman?

Judging from this lethargic comedy, it has. What should have been a fast-moving three-ring circus of fun, with the strange but lovable Pee-wee joining a traveling carnival, quickly fizzles into an uninspired stroll through a menagerie of witless farm and carny gags.

Unlike *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, which overflowed with strange characters, imaginative props and a titular character ready to move heaven and earth to recapture the love of his life (a souped-up bicycle), *Big Top* finds Pee-wee radically changed. In a shift that will probably leave parents reeling, Pee-wee is no longer

presented as an engagingly weird child-man but as a grownup obsessed with sex (jumping his girlfriend at least twice in the movie's opening minutes).

The screenplay also ignores most of what makes Pee-wee fun, as Herman is removed from his magic suburban dwelling and deposited on a farm with no one to speak to but a talking pig named Vance. The only glimpse of Pee-wee's past life is a secret lab in which he and Vance work feverishly on the discovery of the ages—a hot dog tree. In between scientific breakthroughs, Pee-wee tends to his farm and girlfriend in rather lackluster fashion. Thank goodness for a windstorm that drops an entire circus load of eccentrics on Pee-wee's plantation. Naturally, he wants to help the carny folk (led by an out-of-place Kris Kristofferson). And soon the apple of Pee-wee's eye is a fetching Italian aerialist who teaches him the pleasures of being a man (or whatever he is) in a long take that would make Hitchcock proud.



Pee-wee
with Penelope
Ann Miller.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO PEE-WEE

Submitted for your approval, a thin, 30-ish man with a pancake powdered face, a size-too-small suit and a strange childlike disposition. As a star of stage, screen and television, Pee-wee Herman has wormed his way into the very fabric of a nation, infiltrating our homes in legions of products from talking dolls to lunch boxes. He once again has turned his sights to home video, with the release of *Big Top Pee-wee*, his latest excursion into the wonderful world of movies. *VR*'s Doug Brod spoke to the man with the little red bow tie.

VR: At the circus, you were able to do a lot of things most of us would be afraid to try. What were your favorite and least favorite things?

HERMAN: I don't think I had any least favorite things. It was all pretty fun. You know, a lot of it was pretty exciting. I guess working on the tightrope and trapeze was pretty exciting. Just hanging out with the circus people was pretty fun.

VR: Having so many animals on the set at once, did you get into any hairy situations?

HERMAN: Well, I almost got trampled in the stampede when all the animals come to breakfast. You can actually see it in the movie. There was a lot of pretty hairy stuff, the elephants...

VR: Any problems with the hippa?

HERMAN: I stayed away from the hippo. I didn't get too close.

VR: Was Vance the Pig easy to work with?

HERMAN: Yeah, me and Vance developed a rapport pretty quickly.



Besides Pee-wee's romantic triangle and an expected uprising by the town bigots against the circus folk, there's little dramatic excitement, and potentially funny comic pieces are simply ignored. The hot dog tree is a quickly disposed sight gag, and nothing is really made of the fact that Pee-wee's pig talks.

It seems director Kleiser lacks the imagination of Tim Burton, the director of *Big Adventure*. Instead of fleshing out a world in which Pee-wee could live, Kleiser tries to fit him into the real world. The results go against everything Pee-wee stands for. While the movie is not totally devoid of chuckles, fans of Pee-wee will surely be beating a hasty retreat to the *Playhouse* to reaffirm their faith. Those who were never fond of his infantile behavior might get some pleasure out of knowing that Pee-wee, it seems, is beginning to act his age. But as far as most of us are concerned, that's a big mistake.

VR: In the movie you receive a real lang kiss from Valeria Golino. Did you enjoy shooting that scene?

HERMAN: What do you think? Ha, ha.

VR: Were there many retakes?

HERMAN: Yeah, that scene took about a week to shoot.

VR: Will the word "big" appear in the titles of all your movies?

HERMAN: I don't know. So far it has. But I don't know.

VR: If you could play any classic character from history, who would it be?

HERMAN: Boy, that's a tough one. Probably Tarzan, I guess.

VR: Whatever became of the idea to show Pee-wee's *Playhouse* at night for adults who don't, or can't, get up so early on Saturday mornings?

HERMAN: Well, I used to be real opposed to that idea. There was a time when CBS wanted to do it like that. I kinda stopped them because I felt the show was really developed for children to watch on Saturday mornings. Now I'm kinda thinking more like I would like to see it go on

at night, but now I don't know if CBS wants to.

VR: It seems that people either love you or they hate you. How do you respond to your critics?

HERMAN: Well, I don't know. I don't really respond to the critics. I think that would be a big mistake. If people don't like me, I don't care. It makes me feel bad, but not *that* bad. You can't like everybody, so I like people who like me.

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A LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT ★★

Jack Lemmon, Bethel Leslie, Kevin Spacey, Peter Gallagher. Directed by Jonathan Miller. 1987. Not rated. (Vestron cassette, 169 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$59.98)

BY ANDREW SARRIS

It can be argued that Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is the Great American Play—warts, longueurs, crudities, banalities and all. It can also be argued that this TV/video version by Jonathan Miller, based on his 1987 Broadway revival with Lemmon getting star billing in what is essentially a four-character ensemble piece, is far from being the most felicitous production of O'Neill's powerful drama-trauma.

In this instance, the biggest problem is the switch in media. All things being equal, this work belongs on the stage, where the compressed time and space of the action add to the intensity of the dramatic interplay between the tormented members of a drug-and-drink-plagued family. Of course, one big advantage of the video version is that you can arrange your own intermissions. After all, nearly three hours of gloom and doom, however magnificently articulated, is hardly everyone's idea of whoopee.

With the original Broadway stage production—which I saw starring Fredric March, Florence Eldridge, Jason Robards Jr. and air Edmund I can't remember—my own feeling as a playgoer was that O'Neill's archetypal characters transcended the cast. I envisaged a future cast with more charm. But then when Ralph Richardson and Katharine Hepburn brought the March-Eldridge roles to the screen (with Robards as Jamie and Dean Stockwell as Edmund), I found even less emotional fulfillment in that version (now available on Republic cassette) than I had in the play. Perhaps the O'Neill text is too exhausting in performance for it *ever* to be acted and directed adequately.

With this version, moreover, the fact that Lemmon is the only big "name" in the cast hurts the balance of the play. The ending, particularly, finds Leslie's Mary sharing her big, final drug-crazed moments with Lemmon's James, instead of standing apart in her Ophelia-like lunacy. There are too many close-ups and reaction shots throughout when what are called for are more middle-distance Chekhovian group shots, as in the unforgettable BBC Redgrave-Olivier *Uncle Vanya*. Also, Lemmon's persona is shadowed by a movie career often concerned with various stages of alcoholism, so that his *semi*-alcoholic character here becomes more obtrusive as the visual manifestation of a "problem" than does



Long Day's Lemmon, Gallagher: O'Neill with your own intermissions.

Leslie's morphine-addicted Mary. Spacey and Gallagher build very slowly and almost mechanically to their impressively explosive brother-to-brother confrontation, which, for personal reasons, is for me the most shattering scene in the play.

Audiences in the '50s may have found O'Neill somewhat too morbid for comfort, but time has vindicated his vision of the American family as an arena of pain and suffering with little hope of forgiveness and redemption. With all its stylistic limitations, this cassette edition of the play is worthy of the spiritual grandeur of Eugene O'Neill.

STRANGE INTERLUDE ★★

Glenda Jackson, Rosemary Harris, Edward Petherbridge, David Dukes, Ken Howard, Jose Ferrer. Directed by Herbert Wise. 1988. (Fries cassette, 190 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$69.95)

BY BERT WECHSLER

Eugene O'Neill's very long, very noble experiment—this *pas de quatre* of love, hatred and ingrown self-pity, with its grand opera emotions and obvious influences of Ibsen and Freud—is almost perfectly served by this shiny, made-for-TV production. It is close to the torture of life conceived by the playwright, even though I am never convinced that the locale is America and not England.

First, to the smaller roles. Ferrer sets up the drama, and Harris is straight out of *Ghosts*. Petherbridge is absolutely heart-rending for all three hours as the androgynous lover; his understanding surpasseth ours. Dukes and Howard start out unpromisingly but that may be right as they both soon develop the characters O'Neill gave them.

That leaves Jackson. She makes O'Neill's Nina an ancestor of Tennessee Williams' Blanche du Bois but forgets totally that she is also a daughter of

Wedekind's Lulu, in that all men fall in love with her. This is basic to the action, emotion, suffering, poetry. Replaying her psychotic role from *Marat/Sade*, Jackson is harshly brittle and full of personal acting affectations. One can easily predict the melody of her mannered line readings. She is never young, feminine or desirable but only dominating in her planned tics and slashed red mouth.

In the end, the myriad brilliant lines and insights add up only to melodrama without a fulcrum the audience can care about. Still, the passion and soul-ripped poetry of the playwright carries all before it. One is worn, torn and reborn. Dat ol' debble O'Neill!



Christie as Petulia: making her own free-spirited music in '60s San Francisco.

PETULIA ★★

Julie Christie, George C. Scott, Arthur Hill, Richard Chamberlain. Directed by Richard Lester. 1968. Rated R. (Warner cassette, 104 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$59.95)

BY JIM FARBER

When it was released theatrically in 1968, Lester's *Petulia* was considered a hallmark of hip. It had a "with it" San Francisco setting, captured during the height of the Summer of Love. There

were lots of innovative editing techniques and psychedelic fantasy sequences. Plus the movie featured some distinctively '60s characters—namely an emotionally drained middle-aged square (Scott) who's confronted and forever altered by a free-spirited young honey (Christie).

These characters may have had special resonance in their day, but now they seem about as relevant as a black-light poster. Luckily, though, the stylistic innovations of the movie continue to be as jarring and witty as ever. That should come as no surprise, for director Lester came to this project shortly after directing the Beatles' brilliantly innovative *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, as well as the kicky romp *The Knack (And How to Get It)* and the wildly surreal *How I Won the War*.

Petulia continues that wry approach, stressing deadpan visual non sequiturs (a key influence on such later comedy as Monty Python, *Saturday Night Live* and, most recently, *Late Night with David Letterman*). Almost every sequence reveals something strange. Typical is a close-up of Christie in a hospital bed, followed by a longer shot revealing a humongous stuffed giraffe laying grotesquely across her leg. To aid Lester's visual surprises, the great cinematographer (later director) Nicolas Roeg devised a distinctively cartoonish look for the picture.

If only all this style had more content at its core. The basic relationship between Christie (a kook who moans she hasn't had one affair in the entire six months she's been married) and Scott (the newly



divorced doctor she latches on to) is treated with the utmost pretension. The pair are meant to represent far more disillusion, desperation and changing values than the wafer-thin script can possibly accommodate. As a result, part of *Petulia* will always seem smugly out of date. Luckily, though, the other parts should delight forever.

Jim Farber is also a columnist for the New York Daily News and Rolling Stone.



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QUICK TAKES

DESTROYER ★★★

Lyle Alzado, Anthony Perkins, Deborah Foreman. Directed by Robert Kirk. 1988. Rated R. (Virgin cassette, 94 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$79.95)

In the wake of Schwarzenegger's *Terminator*, I expected that we'd be bombarded with a whole slew of hulking, seemingly indestructible killing machines. We haven't, and this is why Alzado's turn as a brutish serial killer (so tough that he absorbs all the current his electric chair dishes out) in this cheeky horror-thriller comes as a



Alzado the Destroyer: bar none.

pleasant if goofy surprise. Alzado—who, we are to believe, escaped from the electric chair during a well-timed prison riot—lives in the abandoned institution. He resurfaces when a movie crew (headed by Perkins) does some location shooting at the prison and proceeds to stalk the troupers one by one, finally meeting his match in feisty stunt woman Foreman. The tale is told with plenty of deadpan gallows humor, and I can honestly say that former grid star Alzado is, er, *electric* as the killer.

(Ed Hulse)

CHEERLEADER CAMP ★

Betsy Russell, Leif Garrett, Teri Weigel. Directed by John Quinn. 1987. Rated R. (Prism cassette, 82 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

What? Another dead-cheerleader movie? Ah, but this one's different: It's got some slick production values and righteous seminude babes—and it doesn't take itself

all that seriously (note the "Teen Comedy/Horror" legend on the cassette box). Teen comedy—when a really fat kid mooning a bunch of girls gets his elephantine tush stuck in a car window frame. That wacky teen comedy. Former estrogen inhibitor Garrett emerges from over a decade of relative inactivity to play the lothario beau of one of the campers at the titular facility.

And judging by his current acting ability, he should be forced back into hibernation. His rap number with the aforementioned gargantuan should be required viewing for all optimists, if only to prove that evil does exist in our world. Hand it to *Angel*'s Russell and Playmate Weigel to provide the much needed eyeful—just kill the volume when they open their mouths.

(Doug Brod)

PRIMAL SCREAM ★★

Kenneth J. McGregor, Sharon Mason. Directed by William Murray. 1987. Rated R. (Magnum cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$79.98)

Take these elements: futuristic setting, boozing cop-turned-P.I., blonde in a push-up bra with a problem (besides breathing), corporate nasties who employ mad doctors, and cops who don't like the boozing cop-turned-P.I. Good. Now go out and



Primal Scream's sci-fi snoozemobile.

make your own movie. It probably won't fall far short of this New Jersey-lensed sci-fi snoozer. Not that it's all bad. The producers just miscast McGregor in the lead and squandered the F/X budget on simulations of disintegrating flesh. I guess this last part is where the title comes from, though the enzyme that causes the crumbling is called Hellfire. A (good) movie shouldn't give you time to ponder such questions.

(Gregory P. Fagan)

VIPER ★★

Linda Purl, James Tolkan, Chris Robinson. Directed by Peter Maris. 1988. Rated R. (Fries cassette, 96 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

You wouldn't normally expect to see the petite TV-movie veteran Purl behind an Uzi, but here she is, blowing away govern-

ment-sponsored goon squads dispatched to shut her up. The widow of a former intelligence man assassinated on the command of his superior officer, Purl learns that her late hubby was involved in a phony terrorist attack—masterminded by bald-headed baddie Tolkan for the purpose of manipulating world events. And when she

decides to blow the lid off Tolkan's little war games, the rogue officer orders her silenced. In typical action-adventure fashion, there are the regulation shootouts, car chases and explosions—and Purl's right in the middle of most of them. She's no Rambo, but this is a fairly entertaining movie for the undemanding.

(Ed Hulse)

GROTESQUE ★

Linda Blair, Tab Hunter, Donna Wilkes, Brad Wilson. Directed by Joe Tornatore. 1987. (Media cassette, 80 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

Just because it only rates one star doesn't mean *Grotesque* isn't worth watching. It's bad all right, but it's bad in ways that virtually defy articulation. Yes, *Grotesque* is one of those movies that has to be seen to be believed. The setup is simple: Blair (looking a tad matronly these days) and pal Wilkes drive up to visit Blair's folks. Dad's a Hollywood makeup artist who likes to



Grotesque gal: under the gun.

scare guests. But the real scare comes when some psychotic punkers overrun the household, unwittingly setting free the mutated thing hidden away in the walls—and hey, we haven't even gotten to Tab Hunter yet! The movie's structure is very peculiar; try to imagine *They Saved Hitler's Brain* backward and you'll get the idea. Since Blair's the associate producer (and what a job she did) she spares herself a nude scene. And finally, the special effects are very cheesy, with the exception of one too-convincing head twisting.

(Glenn Kenny)

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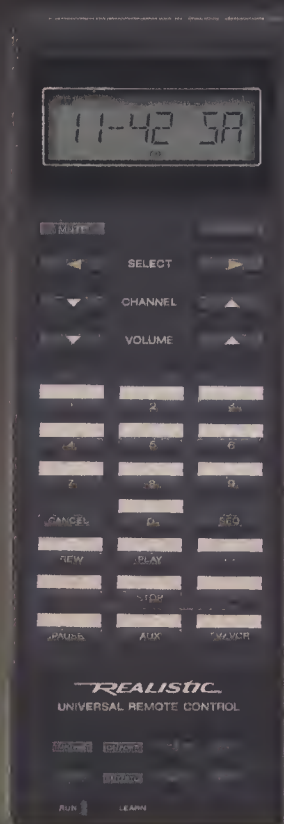
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THE NIGHT BEFORE ★★ ★

Keanu Reeves, Lori Loughlin. Directed by Thom Eberhardt. 1988. Rated PG-13. (HBO cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.99)

BY JIM FARBER

Call it a case of arrested development, but I love teen comedies. Not just the acceptable pioneers of the form either (such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *16 Candles*) but even such derided late-comers as *Secret Admirer*, *The Last American Virgin*, *The Joy of Sex* and *Once Bitten*. Unfortunately, actual teens seem to have tired of the genre (moving on to

more pretentious adolescent "dramedies" like *Pretty in Pink*), making it difficult for the most resolutely silly entries to get a decent audience. Such was the case with *The Night Before*, an unassuming acne-comedy that was never even released in theaters but now, thankfully, has been rescued for home video.

Like all movies true to the teen comedy tradition, it's as dumb as it is delightful. The story revolves around the burning issue of a geek who, through an ill-conceived bet, gets to take a cheerleader to the senior prom. If that sounds familiar, so much the better. (Originality here counts for about as much as it does in

heavy metal songs.) To up the predictable, a series of mishaps occurs on the way to the prom, involving every suburban nightmare of urban life imaginable. In that way, the movie is much like a pint-sized version of *After Hours*, though it contains an element of innocence that earlier flicks could've sorely used.

Actually, that innocent quality is what often gives teen comedies an edge over their adult counterparts—particularly in the area of male leads. After all, most adult males passing for romantic comedy heroes these days (Michael Keaton, Tom Hanks, Eddie Murphy) are unrelentingly arrogant and self-involved, a notable departure from their cinematic antecedents. The leads in teen flicks, on the other hand, tend to betray more vulnerability. And when they don't, age excuses them. That holds true here as well.

Reeves, as the lead, is a wonderful bundle of awkward gestures and innocent assertions. He finds his ideal foil in Loughlin, who skillfully portrays a cynical bitch. Helping them along is a witty script, built around sendups of those most sacred teen subjects: rejection and humiliation. Still, what's most charming about *The Night Before* is its self-awareness. There's an irony here that ultimately has less to do with actual teens than with campy adults. In other words, it's the kind of movie that can draw giggles from goofballs of any age.



VERNON, FLORIDA ★★ ★

The townspeople of Vernon. Directed by Errol Morris. 1981. Not rated. (RCA/Columbia cassette, 58 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

Vernon, Florida, is the sort of place where men become obsessed with worm farming, where fundamentalist preachers give rambling speeches about the "there-after," and where policemen worry about such crimes as stolen bobby pins. It's the sort of place that could easily be mocked or mythologized by a documentary portrait. Luckily, Errol Morris' deservedly celebrated documentary on the town does neither.

Still, his movie does have its absurd moments. There's a visit with an elderly couple who vacationed at a nuclear test sight and returned with sand they insist is growing. There's also an obsessed turkey hunter who, out of nowhere, says things like: "Once you hear a turkey gobble, you forget all about diarrhea." Scenes like this could lead you to believe the townspeople are all secretly extras from a Bartles & James commercial.

In context, though, condescending laughs are hardly the focus. Morris is far more interested in the townspeople's utter conviction in what they do—in their belief systems

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On one level, the speakers may be blathering about different varieties of worms or counting buzzards in a tree, but seamlessly interwoven throughout their speeches is talk of fate and luck, religion and superstition. In capturing this pervasive tendency, Morris has gotten to the heart of something very real about all of us, not just the people shown here. That is, our relentless, unconscious will to infuse even the most arid events with great meaning. (J.F.)

David Warner, Helen Mirren, Diana Rigg, Ian Holm. Directed by Peter Hall. 1968. Not rated. (Warner cassette, Hi-Fi mono, 120 min., \$19.98)

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of the most magical, certainly the most fanciful, and the one most resistant to conventional realism. It is about fairies, mismatched lovers, potions and dreams. Freeing it from realism, Max Reinhardt staged it for the movies in 1935 in an expressionist grove. Later, Peter Brook staged it on trapezes. Then, for this 1968 movie version, Peter Hall, the brilliant director of Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company, decided to brave the Fates and stage it in an actual forest. The results are decidedly earthbound. This is a *Midsummer Night's Dream* that never soars. In fact, it never gets off the ground.

There is some pleasure in watching several fine actors in their youth: Mirren as Hermia, Rigg as Helena, Warner as Lysander and Holm as a particularly puckish Puck. But I prefer Reinhardt's old version (recently withdrawn by Key Video when the company's rights to it expired). It may be bowdlerized Shakespeare, but it's a lot more fun than this dull, sodden production.

DECEMBER 1988 77

PERFORMANCE

VICTOR BORGE ★★★

Victor Borge. No director credited.
1986. (Gurtman & Murtha cassette,
118 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$49.95)

BY CLIVE BARNES

You have to love—at least I do—at any man who marches on stage and announces forthwith (or as he would say, accounting for inflation, “fifthwith”), “We are going to have an intermission pretty soon.” Then he proceeds to harangue the late-comers in his audience (on this occasion in Minneapolis), asking where they came from. When one replies, “St. Paul,” Borge triumphantly says, “I came from Copenhagen and I got here before you!”

This, of course, is Victor Borge, musician-comedian extraordinaire. I love him, and there are two hours of him to love here. No director is named—and clearly one was not needed—for this is a straightforward account of one of his familiar concert gigs, with all the familiar jokes.

With a videocassette of a comedian, there's always the question of what to do with it when you know the jokes. You could, of course, just rent it for one viewing. But, personally, I find Borge and his well-thumbed jokes are joys forever. He is a supreme funster, with a dry wit, a deprecating yet sometimes oddly savage



Borge: Good ol' Hans Christian Mozart.

persona, with a marvelous way of torturing the language with logic. As he is anxious to point out, “It's *your* language. I'm just trying to use it.”

Borge uses the first part of his show to

Clive Barnes is theater and arts critic for The New York Post and former critic for the London Times, The New York Times and radio station WQXR.

establish rapport with the audience, and to establish his offbeat style of humor. The second part is more musical, and no one plays “Chopsticks” with more panache than Borge. All his old jokes and routines are here, from the hilarious phonetic punctuation, to the mimed American folk song, from “Happy Birthday” played in various styles to Gershwin and that Danish composer Hans Christian Mozart. And who else would refer to Giuseppe Verdi as Joe Green?

Tape quality is not exceptional, but not distracting. (Gurtman & Murtha is at 162 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019.)

JACKIE MASON ON BROADWAY ★★★

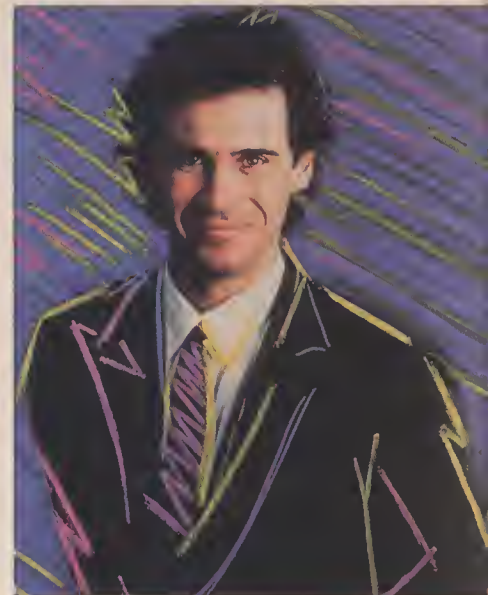
Jackie Mason. Directed by Dwight Hemion. 1988. (HBO cassette, 60 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$39.99)

BY NEAL GABLER

Talking about his hit Broadway show from which this video is taken, comedian Jackie Mason once said that Gentiles leave his show shaking their heads and saying, “He was *funny*!” Jews also leave shaking their heads but saying, “Too Jewish.” For Mason, a former rabbi who sounds like Menachem Begin and looks like a naughty Jewish leprechaun, the possibility of becoming a major Broadway star must have seemed preposterous. For years he knocked around the nightclub circuit as a well-heeled Borsht Belt comic in the ranks of a dozen other similar comics, such as Myron Cohen, Corbett Monica and Sandy Barron, telling Jewish jokes to Jewish audiences. Or was he?

Last year on Broadway in this Tony-winning monologue, Mason was suddenly elevated to a status reserved for only a very few comedians. Watching his performance on video, it's easy to see why. Though he may look and sound like a typical Catskills comic, and though he can bat punch lines with the best of them, Mason is also a shrewd social observer, a lithe physical presence and even something of a political commentator. On the difference between Italians fighting and Jews fighting: “Italians can fight in the street but put them in an army and *phffft*. Jews on the other hand are exactly the opposite.” On Reagan: “All the other politicians run around trying to find a solution. Reagan doesn't know there's a problem.” On why WASPs never have cockroaches: “There's nothing to eat in the house.”

Though one can't fault Mason—his timing is astonishing—one can fault the tape itself for the tinny miking that occasionally garbles the jokes. In *Jackie Mason on Broadway*, where every second promises a laugh, you don't want to miss a word.



Miller: slashing at no-brow icons.

LIVE FROM WASHINGTON ...IT'S DENNIS MILLER ★★★

Dennis Miller. Directed by Paul Miller. 1988. (Vestron cassette, 60 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$39.98)

BY STEVE SCHNEIDER

By now, it is no surprise when people say they no longer want to know the news—that the world's cumulative nastiness has become a bit much to bear. Something of this attitude informs this feisty hour of stand-up, performed by the longtime mock-newscaster on *Saturday Night Live*.

Taped before an appreciative audience in Washington, Miller's low-key, one-man show takes pot shots at the full panorama of American life. He derides the shallowness or speciousness that he finds *everywhere*. In a nondescript dark suit, the comedian unloads on all the easy targets—need we mention K Mart or *The National Enquirer* or Stallone?—in ways that reveal a deep ambivalence about his cultural context. Miller's disdain for these no-brow icons is as strong as the attraction and fascination he finds in them. And, no wonder—on *SNL* Miller has made his name satirizing events and trends that, it becomes clear here, he himself has a hard time stomaching. Unable to make them go away, he makes them ridiculous.

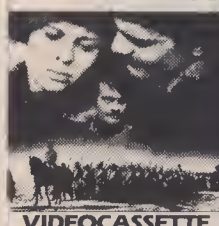
The tape is visually uninteresting. There are no props and little movement, but Miller can be incisively funny—as when he wonders how officials in Los Angeles can find five teensy Medflies but can't catch thousands of illegal aliens. He has picked up much of his delivery from fellow comedian Richard Belzer, and this includes an affection for unbuttoned language: No kid vid, this. Yet the performance can be rewarding, especially for someone looking for a brighter way of looking at the dark side of things.



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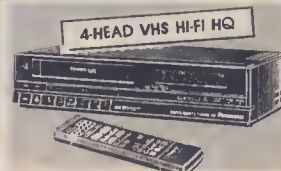
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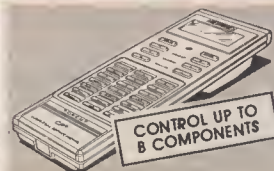
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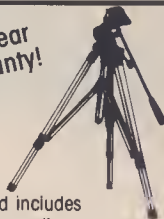


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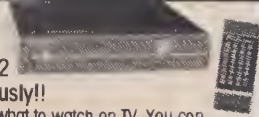
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Big Parade's Adoree, Gilbert: still a memorable movie blockbuster.

CLASSICS

THE BIG PARADE ★★ ★★

John Gilbert, Renee Adoree, Karl Dane.
Directed by King Vidor. 1925. B&W.
(MGM/UA cassette, 138 min., silent
with new orchestral score, Hi-Fi stereo,
\$29.95)

BY WILLIAM K. EVERSON

The growing list of important silent movies being released on video by major studios from pristine preprint material now includes Vidor's classic (and that word is not used loosely) about World War I. Historically, it was the biggest-grossing silent movie ever. Those who know the movie, which so neatly dovetails spectacle and poignant intimacy, will need no recommendation. For them, it's a must.

Those who have not previously seen it and who buy or rent it *because* it is a classic need a word of caution: As the first of a new cycle of war movies in the mid-'20s, *The Big Parade* has a perspective and an honesty denied the gung-ho propagandist pictures actually made during the war. Vidor spends the first 70 minutes reflecting—and condemning—the initial US attitudes of war as a glorious adventure. He fills that portion of the movie with the same kind of bantering camaraderie and comic byplay that the newsreels of the period fed the folks back home. Then, when that first baptism by fire comes, it *really* hits home. In 1925 the approach was right, and any attempt to reedit it for today's audience would be a mistake—a temptation wisely avoided

William K. Everson is professor of film at New York University and The New School, critic for Films in Review, and author of numerous books on movie history.

here. But many movies since this one have covered the same ground, while the spate of Vietnam War pictures tends to jump right in with the blood and death. But bear with *The Big Parade*. The incredible poignancy of the rest of the movie wouldn't work without that opening half.

The battle scenes are big and the emotional scenes are big, but they scale down to the video format consistently. Gilbert's superb (and restrained) performance seems even more naturalistic within the intimacy of the home screen. The gigantic Cedric Gibbons-designed staircase in his home, while appropriate to his financial status, seems less "Hollywood" in the smaller format, and the (very) few technical frailties (the inability to light huge areas of



Non-Angels Grant and Arthur (with John Carroll and Thomas Mitchell): thrills and drama the Hawks way.

open space at night resulted in mild trickery and double exposures in night battle scenes) are largely hidden on video.

Make no mistake: A "big" movie like this is best seen on a big screen. But it works amazingly well on video. It's

helped enormously by Carl Davis' new orchestral score, which uses themes from both the original release and the 1931 sound reissue, fusing them into a score that is modern and yet echoes the quality of the original. Highly recommended.

ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS ★★ ★

Cary Grant, Jean Arthur, Rita Hayworth, Richard Barthelmess.
Directed by Howard Hawks. 1939.
B&W. (RCA/Columbia cassette,
121 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$69.95)

Although now regarded by some as a definitive Hawks classic, this dramatic thriller about a small airline struggling to stay solvent in a death-trap airport in the Andes in 1939 was, in its time, regarded as overlong and overfamiliar, if expertly done. Today Hawks aficionados love it and brook no criticism of its clichés. Those buying or renting it for nostalgia, star names or as a representative picture from one of Hollywood's very best years will also find much to enjoy. No complaints with either approach, except that it's no classic in the sense that some other Hawks pictures are. If it carried Charles Vidor's name as director instead of Hawks', no one would look seriously at it.

The small-screen format is actually something of an asset, as the movie is 85 percent talk. The few aerial action scenes are enhanced on video, too, since the miniature work is a trifle less obvious than it was in theaters. Hawks does a good job of creating entirely in the studio his little seaport/airport milieu, all claustrophobic, hot and rain-soaked.

Grant and Arthur are singularly weak in the leads, but the ensemble supporting cast is excellent—especially Barthelmess, Hayworth and, in one of his best and least stereotyped roles, Sig Ruman. Picture and sound quality are first-rate. (W.K.E.)

THE LADY WITH THE DOG ★★★

Iya Savvina, Alexei Batalov. Directed by Josef Heifitz. 1959. B&W. (Corinth cassette, 85 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$59.95)

BY BERT WECHSLER

This is a Russian tale, sensitively adapted from Chekhov and told with passionate understatement.

We start at the seaside in Yalta. It's fall, at the turn of the century. She is soft, feminine, insecure. He is bored and a bit self-centered. They meet, have what he thinks is just another affair. She leaves for Saratov at her husband's call.

Moscow, winter. He is married to a castrating rich wife and has three children. He longs for the girl from Yalta and thinks he sees the dog. Wrong dog. He realizes he is obsessed, goes to Saratov. An excited meeting at the theater allows only a hurried conversation. She comes to Moscow. They are happy, unhappy. How can they continue? He goes home to his wife. Nothing is certain.

This is enfolded by writer-director Heifitz with taste, beauty and a striking use of black-and-white images. The actors are totally believable and so are the emotions.



Evensong's Laye: unretiring diva.

EVENSONG ★★★

Evelyn Laye, Conchita Supervia, Fritz Kortner. Directed by Victor Saville. 1934. (Bel Canto Society cassette, 85 min., \$39.95)

This rarely seen, English-made movie is one result of secretary-turned-writer Beverly Nichols' obsession and exploitation of his one-time employer, the great Australian soprano Nellie Melba. As adapted from Nichols' novel and play, it is touching, effective and full of music, if also dated technically.

This is also one of the few movies made

by Laye, the long-popular star of British stage musicals between World Wars I and II. She gives a great performance as Maggie O'Brian, from her student days through her reign as the "Queen of Song" into her declining years as an unpleasant old lady who should retire but won't. The movie's first half-hour, notable for Laye's beauty, is close to every young singer's story, but then the plot takes more original turns. The viewer, and not just the opera lover, soon becomes involved and, indeed, engrossed. This is a human drama that holds up beautifully.

The legendary Spanish mezzo Supervia makes a vibrant appearance late in the

movie. And German actor Kortner (best remembered for 1928's *Pandora's Box* and 1945's *The Hitler Gang*) ages sympathetically as Laye's manager and deeply loving friend.

This is one of a series of old, seldom-seen, commercially limited movies available to collectors in the US from the Bel Canto Society (11 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10023). The quality of the prints varies, depending on the condition of the available source material. *Evensong* shows its age, but that will not in the least impair enjoyment for anyone interested in sampling one of the great bygone English musical stars in her heyday. (B.W.)

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T H E A R T S

BERNSTEIN: WEST SIDE STORY—THE MAKING OF THE RECORDING ★★★★★

Leonard Bernstein, Kiri Te Kanawa, Jose Carreras, Tatiana Troyanos, Kurt Ollman. Directed by Christopher Swann. 1986. (Deutsche Grammophon/Polygram LV disc, 90 mins., CD stereo [ADD], \$34.98)

BY ROY HEMMING

There's been no shortage of tributes to Leonard Bernstein in this, his 70th year. He may well be the greatest American

musician of this century, but he is not without his faults and shortcomings. And for what I think is the first time (at least for a public used to seeing mainly his back in the concert hall or his prescribed TV appearances), *both* the charms and the warts of Bernstein are on view in this remarkable documentary, taped during the 1986 recording sessions in New York for a new audio edition of the complete original score of his biggest Broadway (1956) and Hollywood (1961) hit.

The warmth, energy, intensity and magnetism of the man come through continually. But so, too, do the egotism, the moodiness, the excessiveness in words and actions, the often subtle pretentiousness

and, occasionally, the arbitrary pettiness (shown mostly in only half-mocking jibes at his associates). I doubt if any other major classical musician of our time has been so frankly captured by the cameras and microphones—and it is a tribute to Bernstein's honesty about himself that he agreed to permit this production to be released. Of course, rock and pop musicians have been as candidly portrayed for many years now, so perhaps it's time the classical people were, too—and what better subject than Bernstein?

There have been stories for years that Bernstein has always wanted this score to be performed by "real" singers, not Broadway singer-dancer-actors. Actually, there is one such recording, taken from a Vienna State Opera production of the early '70s, but it's sung in German. So when Deutsche Grammophon invited Bernstein to conduct a recording of the complete original score in English with a cast of his own choosing, he jumped at the chance. Curiously enough, he had never before



Carreras: heartfelt but miscast.

actually conducted the entire score (only the Symphonic Dances he arranged for concert performance). Reportedly, not all of Bernstein's choices for the top roles were available, and so compromises and alternates were agreed upon—with what many feel were disastrous results. On a strictly audio basis (which, after all, is what an audio recording should be judged on), the casting of Spanish tenor Carreras as the American hero and New Zealand soprano Te Kanawa as the Puerto Rican heroine makes no sense. But *watching* them on this video version turns their performances into something quite fascinating. There's no question that these are outstanding, dedicated artists, genuinely trying to come to grips with their roles—and completely enraptured by the music. It's easy to *see*, through this documentary's rehearsal and recording sequences, just why these two singers are so genuinely popular with other musicians through-

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out the world as well as with the public.

And how beautifully they both sing—whether or not you accept their dramatic rightness for their roles. Perhaps most splendid of all is their “Tonight” duet—and another duet between Te Kanawa and American mezzo Trosyanos for “I Have a Love.” There’s also a vivid, telling moment when Carreras, after pouring his heart into “Maria,” misses a top G near the end and asks if he can dub it in, only to face an unsupportive Bernstein and be told coldly by the album producers that the session time is up. Carreras storms out of the session understandably angry, as the tension in the room peaks. But then the video shows everyone made up and at work the next day, with Carreras’ retake offering one of the most beautiful “Maria”s you’ll ever hear.

This video version also includes a song not in the audio album, at least not as sung here. It’s the moving “Somewhere,” which in the show is sung by an offstage voice. Bernstein asked Te Kanawa to sing it during one session—which she does meltingly—but then he and the album producers decided to be more faithful to the show’s intent (and also add another star name to the album) by hiring mezzo Marilyn Horne (not in this video production) to sing “Somewhere” for the final album. Te Kanawa fans will be glad her version is preserved here.

But the show is mainly Bernstein’s—and he dominates every instant as he guides his singers and orchestral forces through their paces. If ever there’s been a demonstration as to how a musical genius inspires his colleagues, it’s here. We see Bernstein bouncing jauntily (even funkily) to the rhythmic dance sections, all but weeping as he oozes every nuance out of the ballads, and now and then losing his temper when things don’t go right. It’s Bernstein captured for posterity in full Bernsteinian flight.

As a documentary this is first-rate. But how does it rate as what Polygram insists on calling a CD-video? That’s another subject, for, unlike the audio album (digital all the way), this video production originated with analog sound that has been digitally remastered for this disc edition. So it’s not going to equal sonically what owners of the audio album are used to. But it’s still pretty impressive, and certainly superior to what was telecast last year, especially in the “Dance at the Gym” sequence. There has obviously been some doctoring of the sound here and there to give it more impact.

Curiously, there is no mention until the final printed credits of Stephen Sondheim as the writer of all the songs’ lyrics. Yet it is those lyrics, just as much as Bernstein’s music, that assures *West Side Story*’s continuing place as one of the great works of American musical theater.

VERDI'S LA FORZA DEL DESTINO ★

Leontyne Price, Giuseppe Giacomini, Leo Nucci. Conducted by James Levine. Directed by John Dexter. Video director, Kirk Browning. 1984. (Two Paramount cassettes, Hi-Fi stereo, 180 min., \$39.95)

BY BERT WECHSLER

This Metropolitan Opera performance is dead at the gate. The only reason to rent or own it is as a souvenir of one of the final opera appearances of the great Leontyne Price—and she is here but a shadow (albeit upon occasion a strong shadow) of her legend. Otherwise there is little to draw one’s eyes to the screen and little

more that calls itself to the ear.

Only Nucci (as Carlos) sings consistently well. Giacomini (as Alvaro) has a beat if not bleat in his tenor. Bonaldo Giaiotti and Enrico Fissori (as Guardiano and Melitone) are plodding. Levine’s conducting is merely routine.

Dexter’s non-direction encourages wandering around on stage and old-fashioned “operatic” acting. Eugene Berman is credited for the artful settings, but with all backgrounds in darkness and just some light in the foreground, we rarely see them. Other videocassettes from the Met’s own series have accustomed us to better productions than this.

This time, the *forza* is not with us.

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Folk superstar Collins: Walled in by the Vanilla Principle?

MUSIC

THE FOLK MUSIC REUNION ★★

Judy Collins, Glenn Yarbrough, Tom Paxton, Mary Travers, Kingston Trio. Directed by Tom Grasso. 1982. (JCI cassette, 80 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.95)

BY DAVE VAN RONK

1. *Where have all the flowers gone?* (a) killed by toxic waste; (b) young girls have picked them; (c) San Franciscans are wearing them in their hair.

2. *The name of "The Man Who Never Returned" was:* (a) Judge Crater; (b) Jacob Morley; (c) Charlie.

3. *Puff was:* (a) a small locomotive; (b) Andy Warhol's sidekick; (c) a dragon.

Three correct answers (and, in order, they are b, c, c) and you'll probably love *The Folk Music Reunion*.

For me, the trouble with the pop-folk thing in the '60s was that it was too damn bland. Now, 20 years later, *The Folk Music Reunion* has the same problem. It's the old Vanilla Principle—some people dislike chocolate, others can't stand tutti-frutti, but nobody hates vanilla. Not to say this is a bad show—it's not.

Without exception these performers have improved over the years. Some have even developed. For example, Bob Shane of the Kingston Trio does his '69 hit "Scotch & Soda" a little froggily (a touch of laryngitis?), but it's beautifully phrased and all the more texturally interesting for its raspiness. There's the Limelighters ending "Shine on Me" with a rousing group scat chorus that deservedly brought down the house. There are other fine moments: Paxton's "I Am Changing My Name to Chrysler," Collins' "Send in the Clowns," John Sebastian's sporty guitar picking and jauntily sung "France Blues," and the owner of one of my favorite

voices, Yarbrough, doing "Baby, the Rain Must Fall."

All, however, is not beer and skiffle. This is the second time I have been confronted by "The First Time I Did It" as a reviewer; the last time, it was perpetrated by the Limelighters. This time it's the Kingston Trio's turn. I am determined to stomp this coily smutty, gay-baiting piece of pus into the earth. Cut it out, guys! You only make *yourselves* look bad.

Less egregious but musically awkward is Collins' curiously Bacharachian arrangement of "One of Those Nights," and Travers and Paxton have some heavy pitch problems on "One Hundred Miles." As for the rest, it's okay, but bland, bland, bland. Of the funk and grit of Bleeker and MacDougal Streets in the Dylan era, of the songs and spirit that moved thousands at sit-ins and demonstrations in that uproarious time—nothing. One might suppose that Ike snoozed in the Oval Office straight through to 1970 or so. Doris Day, anyone?

GREETINGS FROM EDEN ALLEY ★★★

Timbuk 3. Directed by Carlos Grasso. 1988. (MCA cassette, 45 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.95)

BY ROBERT CHRISTGAU
AND CAROLA DIBBELL

The success of the Austin husband-and-wife folk duo Timbuk 3 is a freak of the video age. Sure their 1986 hit "The Future's So Bright (I Gotta Wear Shades)" was plenty catchy, but its hook would never have cracked radio without MTV, which picked up instantly on Grasso's cheap, oblique promo clip. Commercially, the duo has the look of another MTV one-shot—and they haven't had a hit since. But unlike the Stray Cats,

say, or Men at Work, they're on the map—their music is substantial enough to merit a following. Thus this Grasso-directed compilation.

Comprising nine song shorts strung together with casual interviews and local TV footage from the little town of Eden, Texas (which they discovered after cutting their second album, *Eden Alley*, in L.A.), the tape begs comparison with David Byrne's *True Stories*. But though, as residents, they probably feel more for Texas than Byrne does, and though the Eden material is charming in a student-art-vid way, the structure isn't just oblique, it's factitious.

What holds *Greetings from Eden Alley* together is the dry, wry, tolerant presence of Pat MacDonald and Barbara K., who maintain their kind cool-no-matter-what images Grasso sticks them with—TV-toting burros, gun-toting tots, septuagenarian ballroom dancers or plain old country sunset.

Too bad this tape is designed to promote Timbuk 3's second and second-best album. "Haircuts and Attitudes" are riper for



Barbara and Pat: Greetings.

visualization than one-dimensional social commentary such as "Rev. Jack & His Roamin' Cadillac Church" and "All I Want for Christmas." But both director and musicians have more to offer than most of the bozos who turn out such product, and we're glad they're in there pitching.

SAVAGE ★★

Eurythmics. Directed by Sophie Muller. 1988. (Virgin cassette, 52 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$29.95)

BY JIM FARBER

Ambition is one thing Eurythmics never lack. To accompany their latest album, they created an entire LP's worth of video clips—all conceptual pieces at that. The move was a bold challenge to the choke-

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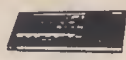
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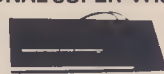
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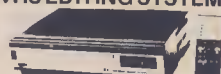
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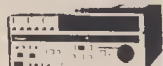
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hold that rote performance clips have on today's music video scene. Still, because the album bombed, only three of the clips wound up on the air. Now the full 12-clip program has arrived on cassette and, unsurprisingly, it's bigger on innovation than sense.

The clips all run together in dream/nightmare fashion, but there's no sense of momentum or connection between them. Inspiration arrives only in spurts. Example: The show starts with the most clumsy and obvious piece, "Listen to Beethoven," taking off from *Diary of a Mad Housewife*. But it's followed quickly by the captivating "I Need a Man," in which singer Annie Lennox mixes the ravenous an-



Eurythmics' Lennox: androgyny redux.

drogyny of Mick Jagger with the trashy allure of Jayne Mansfield. The characters from the first two clips (representing different sides of the same person) return at various points, but their appearances never coalesce into any coherent statement.

In fact, as the clips progress, Lennox's ever-shifting roles start to seem less like characters than just excuses to wear new wigs. That's a problem that has plagued the group throughout its career. A clear follower of David Bowie, Lennox means to create shifting identities, but in fact all she often winds up with is an arty fashion show. That problem is heightened here since the music is artier than usual, emphasizing minimal melodies over synthesized rhythm tracks.

Luckily, individual pieces still stand out. "Do You Want to Break Up?" features some striking and amusing images, even if their connection to the song remains obscure. And pieces such as "Brand New Day" and "I Need You" work completely, the former exuding optimism without naivete, the latter capturing a harsh view of romance without cynicism. Even for those pieces that go totally over the edge, however, some respect is due. After all, unlike most of today's music clips, these, at least, have nerve.

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WARM UP WITH TRACI LORDS ★

Traci Lords. Directed by Stewart Dell. (Starmaster cassette, 30 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$39.95)

NOT OF THIS EARTH ★★★

Traci Lords, Arthur Roberts. Directed by Jim Wynorski. Rated R. (MGM/UA cassette, 80 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95)

BY GLENN KENNY

Traci Lords (she of the heartbreaking pout and dangerous curves) was one of the hottest stars in the adult-movie industry until 1986, when it came to light that her entire pornographic oeuvre was made while she was underage. Now, at the ripe old age of 20, she's making her video debut in two "mainstream" efforts.

Warm Up with Traci Lords purports to be an exercise tape and, to these eyes, it's an ill-advised move. It takes its cue more from the softcore gyrations of those early '80s *Aerobicise* tapes (fave demos of consumer electronics salesmen in those boom years) than from the serious shape-up tapes of today. Poor production values abound as Lords and two other exercisers perform their moves in someone's living room, occasionally smiling (no doubt because an off-screen prompter is screaming "smile!") and most of the time looking awkward. I don't think men are likely to exercise along with this, and I'm sure women will get this tape's number pretty quickly (since the preponderance of mid-torso shots of the beautiful Lords is impossible to ignore).

Much better is the B movie *Not of This Earth*, a briskly paced remake of a minor but memorable 1957 Roger Corman sci-fi



Lords: not exactly a mermaid.

effort. Lords plays a wisecracking nurse who's given an unusual case: a guy who wears sunglasses all the time and needs constant blood transfusions (Roberts). It turns out the fellow is from another planet, sent on a mission to steal the Earth's blood. His indifference to Lords' charms is played to minor comic effect, but his chauffeur makes up for it with heavy drooling and mugging. His unabashed appreciation gives rise to an intriguing poolside exchange: Lords, in a heart-attack inducing string bikini, dives in and the chauffeur says, "You swim like a mermaid." "Maybe I am one," Lords replies, in a sly wink to her triple-X past. (In *Talk Dirty to Me Part III*, a *Splash* rip-off, she did play a mermaid.)

And judging from her *Earth* performance, Lords is at least as good an actress as, say, Daryl Hannah. Sure, she needs polish: Her range is narrow (going from utter adorableness to bad-girl petulance with few stops in between) and she rushes her lines too much. But she has undeniable presence and is genuinely likable.

THE BEACH WORKOUT ★★★

David Essel. Directed by Long John Biffar. 1987. (Academy cassette, 45 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.95)

PUMPING RUBBER ★★★

David Essel. Directed by Long John Biffar. 1988. (Academy cassette, 50 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$24.95)

BY GREGORY P. FAGAN

Essel's first tape met with appropriate approval last year—*Shape* magazine listed it among the year's top ten tapes. I tend to agree. He falls a little short, however, in his more recent effort, *Pumping Rubber*.

Beach Workout is actually a conventional aerobic workout (in case you expected deep-sand muscle-building), with a bit of upper-body resistance exercise thrown in for good measure (in fact, the cassette comes with a large rubber band for the program's resistance segment). Essel describes the aerobic movements well, though he may go too quickly for some beginners. I crossed my legs wrong once and clobbered a nearby refuse pail.

No such problem arose during the *Pumping Rubber* tape. The movements are controlled, with an emphasis on "body alignment." Spri Products, the tape's openly plugged sponsor, includes two of its rubber bands and a length of rubber resistance tubing with the package. Essel, indoors this time, defines a fairly tedious regimen of band and tube exercises. While he's as amiable a motivator as you'll find, Essel can't make up for this tape's limited variety of movements. I was left with the feeling that they developed upper- and lower-body exercises only for the products.

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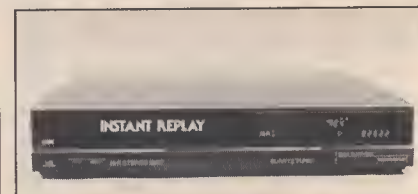
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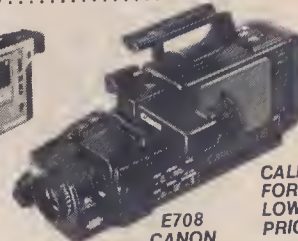
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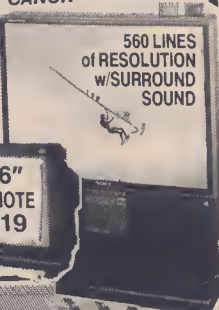
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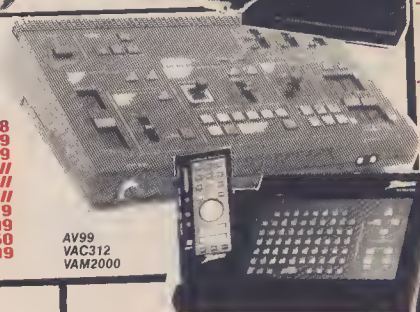
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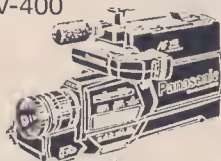
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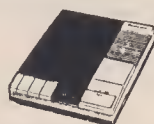
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CHRISTMAS WITH LUCIANO PAVAROTTI ★★

Luciano Pavarotti, Montreal chorus and orchestra conducted by Franz-Paul Decker. Directed by Jean-Yves Landry. 1986. (Video Treasures cassette, approx. 60 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$9.98)

I suppose there may be some parts of the country where this concert hasn't been shown to death on television during recent holiday seasons. Perhaps this release may serve a purpose in such places. Otherwise, there's not much to recommend it, mostly on technical grounds (including duplication at LP speed). Its fair-to-middling video and audio qualities make it only marginally better than what home tapers would get by taping it off TV.

The program itself is pleasant enough and properly reverential, as produced in straightforward concert fashion in Montreal's impressive Notre Dame Cathedral.

Vocally, Pavarotti has given us more elegant and eloquent performances than he does here, but even second-best Pavarotti can be thrilling. The program includes

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"Ave Maria," "Silent Night," "O Holy Night," "Adeste Fidelis" and other traditional pieces, plus a Pavarotti-less "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*. (R.H.)

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Daffy Duck in
one of his
quieter moments.

ANIMATION

DAFFY DUCK'S MADCAP MANIA ★★★

Animated featurettes. Directed by Robert McKimson, Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng. 1988 compilation. (Warner cassette, 45 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95)

BUGS BUNNY'S HARE- RAISING TALES ★★

Animated featurettes. Directed by Robert McKimson, Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Abe Levitow. 1988 compilation. (Warner cassette, 45 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95)

BY STEVE SIMELS

Even post-Roger Rabbit, it seems that Toons get no respect. Believe it or not, there are still curnudgeons out there who can look at classic Warner Bros. animation, at the boundless situational and visual imagination of creators such as Chuck Jones and Tex Avery and profess to find only gratuitous violence and cruelty. Fortunately, most of the rest of us recognize that characters like Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck are comic inventions approaching the sublime.

In any case, given that Warners has resumed cartoon production after nearly two decades and that Daffy's latest short *Night of the Living Duck* was selected to open the prestigious New York Film Festival, these two new compilations are especially timely and welcome. Both feature cartoons new to home video, and both, in spots, are very, very funny.

On balance, the Daffy Duck collection gets higher marks, if only because it's heavier on the late '40s and early '50s, when the studio's animators were at a white heat of inspiration. The Bugs Bunny tape features some later entries where the

animation is less opulent, the stories more dependent on dialogue than on visual humor and slapstick. But both anthologies contain absolute gems, particularly Bugs in Freleng's *Rabbitson Crusoe* (with its running confrontation between Yosemite Sam and the predatory fish he refers to as "a shark-eared galoot") and Daffy in Jones' *You Were Never Duckier*, in which the avaricious fowl has his first encounter with Henry and George K. Chickenhawk. Both tapes also feature absolutely first-rate film-to-tape transfers, with startlingly lush color.

THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN, VOLS. 1-3 ★★★

Animated featurettes. Directed by Max and Dave Fleischer, Isidore Sparber. 1988 compilations. (Bridgestone cassettes, 50 min. each, Hi-Fi mono, \$29.95 each)

Batmania may already be in the air for '89, what with the forthcoming Michael Keaton-Jack Nicholson *Batman* movie (noticed all those kids in Batman T-shirts lately?). But let's not forget that 1988 has marked the 50th anniversary of the



The Big Red S: in mint shape.

original comic book megastar, Superman (a.k.a. the Son of Krypton, the Man of Steel and the Big Red S). After all, Superman is still to comics what Elvis is to rock 'n' roll—the breakthrough figure that made an entire art form (and industry) possible.

Bridgestone's new Superman collection is, if memory serves (and if it does I hope it washes its hands), the first to collect all 17 Superman cartoons made by the Fleischer Studios for Paramount between 1941 and 1943. Since these cartoons are now in the public domain, they've previously turned up on a lot of video labels in transfers of variable quality, the best looking of which, heretofore, have been part of the Warner reissues of the Superman serials and TV shows. Bridgestone, however, reports that its transfers are from mint 35mm prints, and, sure enough, these look and sound better than any tape versions I've yet seen.

As for the cartoons themselves, they're basically charming, if inconsistent. Obviously the Fleischers lavished a lot of care and money on these shorts. But they weren't Disney, and often what they achieved is a frustrating mixture of terrific background detail and naturalistic movement alongside cheesy stuff not much more impressive than present-day Saturday-morning animation. But even the indifferently executed entries are fun in a period way, and the better ones—including the second in the series, "The Mechanical Monsters" (Vol. 1), which anticipates *The Transformers* by about 40 years, "Arctic Giant" (Vol. 1), which anticipates *Godzilla* by about 30, and the spookily atmospheric "Mummy Strikes" (Vol. 3)—are both entertaining and impressive reminders of the potential of the medium. If, like me, you're a Baby Boomer who saw these on TV at an impressionable age, you'll probably have to have all three volumes. (S.S.)

KID VIDEO

DISNEY'S SING ALONG SONGS: YOU CAN FLY! ★★★

Voices of Angela Lansbury, Dick Van Dyke, Peggy Lee. 1988. (Disney cassette, 29 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95)

BY GENEVIEVE A. KAZDIN

Here are some of the best musical moments from the Disney archives, all tied together and introduced by Prof. Ludwig von Drake. Lyrics are superimposed on the scenes and a Mickey silhouette leads us through the sing-alongs. Okay, so this is one more recapitulation of old material for video. But most kids will find

Steve Simels is also a longtime critic for Stereo Review.



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it fun to watch—and when was the last time you thought of Disney's *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*? From it, Lansbury sings "Beautiful Briny." There are also songs from Disney's *Jungle Book*, *Pinocchio*, *Winnie the Pooh* and *Mary Poppins*. Best of all is the glorious "When I See an Elephant Fly" from *Dumbo*.

**COLOR ME A RAINBOW:
HEY, KIDS! IT'S JESUS.
HE'S OUR SHEPHERD ★★ ★**

Jana Wacker and her puppets. Directed by Linda King. 1988. (Word Inc. cassette, 25 min., price not available)

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If your family is Christian and you're concerned about your child's entertainment options, this thoughtful, carefully produced video release is worth checking out.

Concentrating on the concept of Jesus as the Shepherd of His flock, the tape presents little playlets about being lost, praying for help, receiving it and being found. Featuring Jana Wacker and her puppets, the skits make their points without being frightening or threatening. I found the voices of some of the puppets less than pleasant, however.

A group of very appealing young children then tell what Jesus means to them. The innocence and sweetness of these children are touching and moving—and they may help other young viewers understand and express their own feelings.

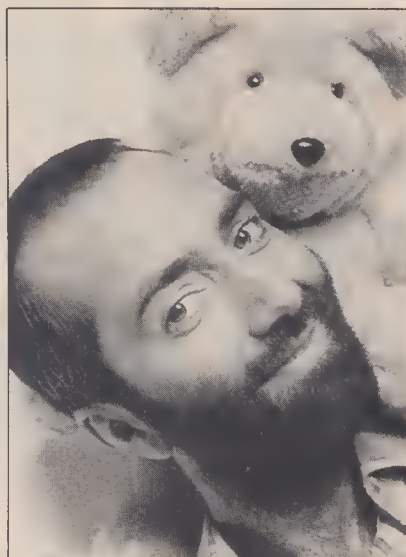
American sign language is used to help teach a simple song. This use of hand action helps hold the interest of young viewers and, of course, helps foster understanding of the hearing-impaired. The tape ends with Wacker leading viewers in prayer. (Word Inc. is at P.O. Box 80033, Lincoln, NE 68501.)

**RAFFI IN CONCERT
WITH THE RISE AND
SHINE BAND ★★ ★ ★**

Raffi. Directed by David Divine. 1988. (A&M cassette, 50 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.98)

There is scarcely a child in the US or Canada who doesn't know Raffi and love him and his songs. He's been rightly called the Pied Piper of the Pampers set and the Bruce Springsteen of the preschoolers. His books, audiotapes and first videocassette have all been bestsellers.

In this, his second videocassette, he simply sits before a small studio audience and sings as he strums his guitar (with subtle backing by the small Rise and Shine Band), urging children to follow along. Flashing his expressive eyes, this gentle, easygoing performer entices all of us—young and not



Raffi, the preschoolers' Springsteen.

so young—into exuberantly joining in, performing traditional hand movements to familiar songs and then literally dancing in the aisles (well, the studio audience at least, but also probably those watching at home, too).

Raffi works on a modest set, with clever lighting to help create the moods for his songs, which move from a raucous "Knees Up, Mother Brown" to a sweet "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and his now-classic "Baby Beluga." By his seventh-inning "Shake My Sillies Out," he has the whole audience on its feet, shakin' along.

As a children's video program, this all works beautifully. Raffi plays close to the camera, creating an intimate experience for young viewers. Shots of the studio audience help draw home viewers into the group with the feeling of being part of a special experience—something that few children's videocassettes do well.

It's obvious that Raffi cherishes this planet and its children. That outpouring of love and respect is his only message. Don't let your kids miss out on it. (G.A.K.)

**SHARI'S CHRISTMAS
CONCERT ★★ ★**

Shari Lewis. Directed by John Thomson. 1981. (Fries cassette, 50 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95)

I have long admired Lewis' ability to relate to youngsters. Through TV, books and tapes (audio and video), she has brought fun, music, crafts, laughter and things to think about to so many children.

Here we have her conducting a symphony orchestra in music by Tchaikovsky plus some Christmas carols. She sings and chats with Lamb Chop, a truly dazzling display of her ventriloquism talents. She also talks with Captain Person, a green Kangaroo-puppet violinist who can't find his bow but loves to fiddle around. I found

this conversation a bit too cute and it leans a little too close to *double entendre* for very young kids, but the older members of the program's live audience laughed loudly.

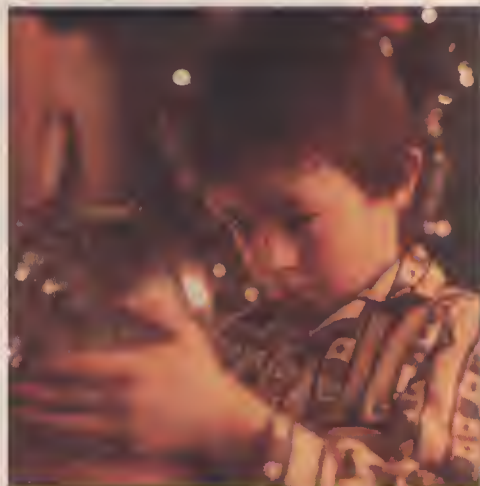
Lewis' star turn here is a chorus line dance. It is clever, funny, a sheer delight. All in all, this Christmas concert is a slick, professional production. Those who enjoy Shari will love it. Yet her very versatility somehow seems diluted rather than emphasized by its abundance. In trying to do something for everyone, it isn't quite dead-on for me. (G.A.K.)

**A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS
IN WALES ★★ ★ ★**

Denholm Elliott. Directed by Dan McBrearty. 1988. (Vestron cassette, 55 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.98)

The very simplicity of the plot presented on this tape provides the richness and depth of an extraordinary viewing experience. In this literate and sensitive adaptation of Dylan Thomas' well-loved memoir, young Thomas, his parents and his grandfather spend Christmas Eve together. The old man tells stories of the holidays of his youth. We see, in flashback, all the antic adventures, the closeness of family, the silly pranks and the deep abiding tenderness.

The screen is filled with images of Wales and of cats, boys and snow. Beautifully shot and edited, the tape depicts what we, in our '80s technological age, think of as a gentler



Tenderness and silliness in Wales.

time—and proves that the essence of childhood remains ever the same.

Elliott's voice wraps the viewer in warmth, music and power as he takes us all back through these memories. Children from about age five on up will enjoy this Grandfather, although younger ones may have a problem with the unfamiliar Welsh accents.

If I could give only one perfect gift to the children I love this year, it would be this tape, a copy of the book and enough time to share this magic together. (G.A.K.)



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SHINE BAND**

Raffi. Directed by Dan McBrearty. 1988. (A&M cassette, Hi-Fi mono, \$19.98)

There is scarcely a Canadian who doesn't know him and his songs. He is the Pied Piper of the Bruce Springsteen of books, audiotapes and have all been bestsellers.

In this, his second video, Raffi sits before a small group of children and sings as he strums his guitar, backed by the small band of children, urging children to follow him with his expressive eyes, the performer entices all



Raffi, the preschoolers' Springsteen.

so young—into exuberantly joining in, performing traditional hand movements to familiar songs and then literally dancing in the aisles (well, the studio audience at least, but also probably those watching at home, too).

Raffi works on a modest set, with clever lighting to help create the moods for his songs, which move from a raucous "Knees Up, Mother Brown" to a sweet "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and his now-classic "Baby Beluga." By his seventh-inning "Shake My Sillies Out," he has the whole audience on its feet, shakin' along.

As a children's video program, this all works beautifully. Raffi plays close to the camera, creating an intimate experience for young viewers. Shots of the studio audience help draw home viewers into the group with the feeling of being part of a special

this conversation a bit too cute and it leans a little too close to *double entendre* for very young kids, but the older members of the program's live audience laughed loudly.

Lewis' star turn here is a chorus line dance. It is clever, funny, a sheer delight. All in all, this Christmas concert is a slick, professional production. Those who enjoy Shari will love it. Yet her very versatility somehow seems diluted rather than emphasized by its abundance. In trying to do something for everyone, it isn't quite dead-on for me. (G.A.K.)

**A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS
IN WALES ★★ ★ ★**

Denholm Elliott. Directed by Dan McBrearty. 1988. (Vestron cassette, 55 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.98)

The very simplicity of the plot presented on this tape provides the richness and depth of an extraordinary viewing experience. In this literate and sensitive adaptation of Dylan Thomas' well-loved memoir, young Thomas, his parents and his grandfather spend Christmas Eve together. The old man tells stories of the holidays of his youth. We see, in flashback, all the antic adventures, the closeness of family, the silly pranks and the deep abiding tenderness.

The screen is filled with images of Wales and of cats, boys and snow. Beautifully shot and edited, the tape depicts what we, in our '80s technological age, think of as a gentler



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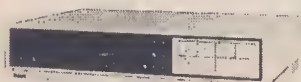
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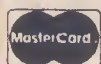
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The Laser Video Disc Companion, subtitled *A Guide to the Best and Worst*, edited by Douglas Pratt. This book covers not only some 1,200 LV discs in release in the US but also provides a list of Japanese-made discs that can be found in import shops. The reviews are concise and incisive and include pertinent comments on the quality of the source material where appropriate (bravo for that). Those who've come to LV discs recently via combination CD/LV players will find this an especially useful guide for catching up on present videodisc availabilities. (New York Zoetrope, New York, paperback, \$16.95)

The Complete Guide to Videocassette Movies, edited by Steven H. Scheuer, Mark Harris and Gregory Martino. "Complete" may be overstating the contents, but this is a valuable reference source for anyone building a video collection of movies. Some 5,000 movies are covered (less than half of what's out there) in capsule reviews that, where appropriate, tell how the video versions may differ from the versions seen on TV or in theaters. (Henry Holt & Co., New York, paperback, \$19.95)

Leonard Maltin's TV Movies & Video Guide, 1989 Edition, still the most accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date guide to all kinds of movies—more than 18,000 in the latest edition of 1,225 pages. TV commentator and VR reviewer Maltin (together with five credited associates) provides concise, lively, gutsy and sometimes very funny critiques that home tapers and renters will find not just useful but indispensable. We have only two quibbles: There are no star ratings for made-for-TV movies (an outdated and snobbish position in '88?), and the same symbol is used to indicate videodiscs and videocassettes of a movie. But the many pluses of the book far outweigh these minuses. (Signet, New York, paperback, \$5.95; also in an oversized trade paperback Plume edition, \$12.95)

How to Shoot Your Kids on Video, by David Hajdu. Most parents use their camcorders to record their kids from crib to Graduation Day, but do so too often on a hit-or-miss basis. Longtime VR editor/writer Hajdu has packed this fun-reading little volume with easy-to-follow tips and ideas you're not likely to come up with on your own, including several ready-to-shoot scripts you can adapt to involve the whole family. (Newmarket Press, New York, paperback, \$10.95)

Spies and Sleuths: Mystery, Spy and Suspense Films on Videocassette, edited by James J. Mulay, Daniel Curran, Jeffrey H.

Wallenfeldt, with a foreword by Michael Caine. Mystery fans (and who isn't one?) will love this handy guide to the thousands of thrillers that have made it to video. In addition to concise reviews and production credits for each title, there's also a useful listing of the movies in terms of appropriateness for children, as well as separate listings for source authors, series entries, performers, etc. (CineBooks, Inc., Evanston, IL, paperback, \$8.95)

The Hollywood Studio—House Style in the Golden Age of Movies, the newest book by Ethan Mordden, one of the liveliest and most prolific chroniclers of movie history (and the arts in general). He probes not only what made MGM, Warner, Paramount, Fox, Universal and RKO movies distinctive, but does so in meaningful terms of the studios' inner battles and history. (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, hardcover, \$24.98)

An Empire of Their Own, by Neal Gabler, a VR reviewer and former co-host of PBS's *Sneak Previews*. Subtitled *How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, this is as lively and thought-provoking a look at Hollywood history as anyone has researched and written in years. It examines the lives of the major studios' founding fathers (such as Mayer, Zukor, Warner, Laemmle, Goldwyn—most of whom were Eastern European Jewish immigrants) in terms of the anti-Semitism of the period and how, as studio heads, their own efforts to assimilate into the American mainstream effectively popularized the genteel (and gentle) ethics of "the American dream"—and helped to shape the values of several generations of moviegoers. (Crown Publishers, New York, hardcover, \$24.95)

Encyclopedia of the Musical Film, by Stanley Green. A new paperback edition of a well-researched, valuable 1981 reference tool for movie-musical lovers and collectors of the genre on video. The book covers performers, songwriters, songs, directors, choreographers and so on, from "Abba Dabba Honeymoon" to Vera Zorina. (Oxford Paperbacks, New York, \$13.95)

The Melody Lingers On: The Great Songwriters and Their Movie Musicals, by Roy Hemming (VR's reviews editor). This book—a new, liberally illustrated, paperback edition of the first critical survey of the movie work of 16 top composers (from Berlin and Gershwin to Rainger and Warren) who helped shape the history of the Hollywood musical—includes both a discography and videography of each composer. (Newmarket Press, New York, paperback, \$16.95)

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P R E V I E W S

COMEDY

BAGDAD CAFE (1988) A tubby German *hausfrau* pulls into an out-of-the-way California motel. Naturally, Jack Palance falls in love with her. Rated PG. (*Virgin*, Dec. 14)

BODY BEAT (1988) Jazz and rock dancers invade a staid ballet academy. The obligatory wacky antics and flashdancing ensue. Rated PG. (*Vidmark*, Nov. 30)

THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE (1958) A merchant seaman is put in charge of a luxury liner. Like *Ship of Fools*, but with more laughs. (*Paramount*, Nov. 30)



Paul Reiser contemplates the meaning of life.

CARRY ON DOCTOR (1968) Kenneth Williams, Jim Dale and the usual gang of twits invite potential malpractice suits. (*Paramount*, Nov. 30)

DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE (1954) Med students Kenneth More and Dirk Bogarde explore suture-pulling and Kay Kendall. (*Paramount*, Nov. 30)

INDISCREET (1958) Movie star Ingrid Bergman romances NATO official Cary Grant until Cary gets cold feet. Much sophisticated banter and champagne swilling follow. (*Republic*, Nov. 30)

THE MODERNS (1988) Keith Carradine, Linda Fiorentino, John Lone and Geraldine Chaplin are the Lost Generation in director Alan Rudolph's account of Paris, 1926. Rated R. (*Nelson*, Nov. 30)

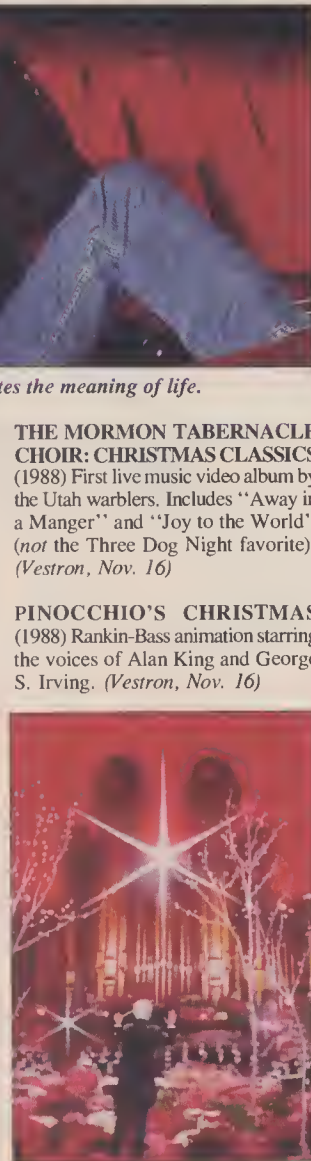
OPERATION PETTICOAT (1959) Proving that war is hell, Cary Grant and Tony Curtis chaperone a submarine full of Army nurses. Kind of like *Das Boot*, but with fewer Germans. (*Republic*, Nov. 7)

PAUL REISER: OUT ON A WHIM (1988) The stand-up comic/*Aliens* bad guy uncovers the mean-

ing of life in this made-for-cable special. (*Vestron*, Nov. 30)

RETURN OF THE KILLER TOMATOES: THE SEQUEL (1988) Those homicidal berries are back to relive their salad days. John Astin stars as Professor Gangrene. Rated PG. (*New World*, Nov. 15)

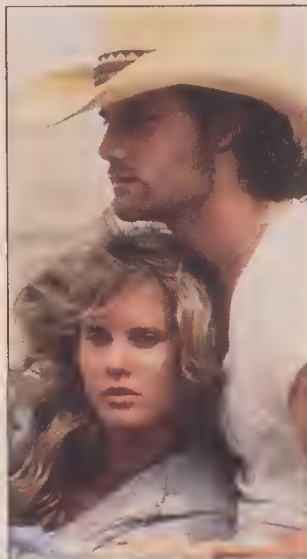
CHRISTMAS CHEER AN AMERICAN CHRISTMAS CAROL (1979) Henry Winkler stars in an updated version of the old Dickens story. Kind of like *Happy Days*, but without Suzi Quatro. (*Vestron*, Nov. 16)



Christmas with the Mormons.

THE MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR: CHRISTMAS CLASSICS (1988) First live music video album by the Utah warblers. Includes "Away in a Manger" and "Joy to the World" (not the Three Dog Night favorite). (*Vestron*, Nov. 16)

PINOCCHIO'S CHRISTMAS (1988) Rankin-Bass animation starring the voices of Alan King and George S. Irving. (*Vestron*, Nov. 16)



This couple Made in USA.

DRAMA

THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (1952) Kirk Douglas is the ruthless, amoral studio boss. Lana Turner, Walter Pidgeon and Gloria Grahame are the people he stepped on to get to the top. (*MGM/UA*, Nov. 15)

EXECUTIVE SUITE (1954) William Holden and Walter Pidgeon face off in a story of intrigue at a giant furniture company. Kind of like *Dallas*, but with better furnishings. (*MGM/UA*, Nov. 15)

MADE IN USA (1988) Two coal miner's sons hit the road a la *Easy Rider*. Imagine their surprise when the girl of their dreams (Lori Singer) turns out to be radioactive. Rated R. (*Nelson*, Nov. 30)

MURDER ONE (1988) Henry (E. T.) Thomas helps his brothers bust out of jail and then heads into *In Cold Blood* country. Rated R. (*Nelson*, Nov. 16)

SOME CAME RUNNING (1958) Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Shirley MacLaine combat small-town hypocrisy while looking for Carl Lewis. (*MGM/UA*, Nov. 15)

STAND AND DELIVER (1988) Dedicated math teacher Edward James Olmos teaches hardcore inner-city students calculus. Lou Diamond Phillips is the star pupil. Rated PG. (*Warner*, Nov. 16)

SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS (1957) Burt Lancaster and Tony Curtis are sleazy New York showbiz

types with a taste for booze, babes and back stabbing. Written by Clifford Odets, who knew from such things. (*MGM/UA*, Nov. 15)

MUSICAL

OPERA DO MALANDRO (1987) Comic song-and-dance fest set in wartime Rio, featuring small-time gangsters, Nazi sympathizers and whores with hearts of you-know-what. In Portuguese with English subtitles. (*Virgin*, Nov. 16)

OLD WEST

CHARRO! (1969) Elvis Presley makes like Clint Eastwood in a sort of American spaghetti western. *Highway to Heaven's* Victor French is the heavy. Rated G. (*Warner*, Nov. 16)

THE CHEYENNE SOCIAL CLUB (1970) Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart inherit a Wyoming brothel run by Shirley Jones! Rated PG. (*Warner*, Nov. 16)

EL CONDOR (1970) Jim Brown, Lee Van Cleef and a few Apaches storm a fortress stocked with gold. Larry (*It's Alive*) Cohen wrote it, and Elisha Cook Jr. is in there somewhere. Rated R. (*Warner*, Nov. 16)



Oh no, not Murder One.

THE STALKING MOON (1969) Army scout Gregory Peck escorts Eva Marie Saint and her half-breed son through Indian territory while the boy's father hits the warpath. Rated G. (*Warner*, Nov. 16)

MYSTIC EAST

ENDURANCE (1988) A 90-minute version of the inexplicably popular Japanese TV game show. Sample stunt: a contestant tries to stay still with a rat on his chest. Sheesh. (*New Star*, Nov. 23)

NINJA, THE VIOLENT SORCERER (1988) Evil magicians, powerful vampires, gambling lords and great ninjitsu warriors mix it up. Proust, this isn't. (*TWE*, Nov. 16)

DOCUMENTARY

THE MARCH OF TIME: TROUBLE ABROAD (1988) The latest six-cassette installment in the series based on historic newsreels produced by *Time* magazine. This volume covers 1937-1939. (Nelson, Nov. 30)

ACTION

AND THEN YOU DIE (1988) Beleaguered Mafia don hires Hell's Angels to get competitors off his back. Obviously, he never saw *Gimme Shelter*. Rated R. (Vidmark, Nov. 16)

FEAR (1988) Vietnam vet Cliff DeYoung and family run into crazed Frank Stallone. They don't exchange phone numbers. Rated R. (Virgin, Nov. 16)

FREEWAY (1988) Art imitates life as a nutty killer, prowling the highways of Los Angeles, institutes a unique brand of traffic control. Rated R. (New World, Nov. 15)

THE LAST WITNESS (1988) The government says Jeff Henderson is a dangerous nut and they've mounted a manhunt to prove it. Can Henderson get to Canada before the Feds ice him? Dunno. (TWE, November 16)

FAMILY

STARSTRUCK (1988) Sixteen-year-old Alicia (Trini Alvarado) is torn between her mom's wishes and a singing career. Sort of like *Golden Boy*, but without the boxing. (New World, Nov. 15)



Howling IV: Aaahhhow!

HORROR

HOWLING IV: THE ORIGINAL NIGHTMARE (1988) Romy Windson and Susanne Severeid answer questions left hanging from the first three Howlings. (IVE, Dec. 8)

SLEEPAWAY CAMP II: UNHAPPY CAMPERS (1988) Pamela Springsteen (yes, *his* sister) and Renee Estevez do Freddy and Jason imitations in a tongue-in-cheek slice-and-dice epic. Rated PG. (Nelson, Nov. 16)

THRILLER

BAD DAY AT BLACK ROCK (1954) Disaster strikes CBS corporate headquarters...No, this is really about one-armed cop Spencer Tracy

cleaning up a corrupt small town. (MGM/UA, Nov. 15)

CALL ME (1988) Patricia Charbonneau thinks those heavy-breathing phone calls are from her boyfriend. Then murder and mystery reverse the charges. Rated R. (Vestron, Nov. 30)

DEFENSE PLAY (1987) Stars of *Night of the Creeps* and *Teen Wolf* unite in director/Renaissance man Monte Markham's reworking of the premise of *War Games*. Rated PG. (TWE, Nov. 16)

NIGHT ZOO (1988) A Canadian ex-jailbird tries to escape from his past. Sort of like 'night, Mother, but with fewer laughs. (New World, Nov. 15)

THE SUICIDE CLUB (1988) Mariel Hemingway plays a home version of *Wheel of Fortune* where "winners" have to off themselves. Rated R. (Academy, Nov. 22)

SCI-FI

ALIEN FROM L.A. (1988) Sports Illustrated swimsuit model Kathy Ireland plays a Valley Girl who discovers the lost continent of Atlantis. Fer sure. (Media, Nov. 23)

CHERRY 2000 (1988) Melanie Griffith helps David Andrews find spare parts for his robot love slave in a post-nuke-apocalypse wasteland. A bit like *Red Desert*, but without Monica Vitti. Rated PG-13. (Orion, Nov. 17)

TOMORROW'S CHILD (1982) William Atherton and Stephanie Zimbalist impersonate parents in a supersecret grow-an-artificial-baby experiment. (Key, Nov. 23)



Aural sex in Call Me.

BIOGRAPHY

LBJ: THE EARLY YEARS (1986) Randy Quaid is the belabored Prez in this look at the career of Lyndon Baines Johnson. (Fries, Nov. 22)

SOMEBODY UP THERE LIKES ME (1956) Paul Newman takes it on the chin in director Robert Wise's meditation on the life of former middleweight champion Rocky Graziano. (MGM/UA, Nov. 15)

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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY

JVC S-VHS VCR, Model HR-S5000U

This, the third S-VHS VCR introduced by JVC (the company that pioneered the format) fills a gap in the general lineup of S-VHS products. The HR-S5000U is a sophisticated deck, no doubt about that. But in its features and its configuration, it seems to have been conceived as a high-end household VCR. That is, its feature array will have more appeal to the inveterate time-shifter and movie watcher than to the semipro video maven. It's got an MTS decoder for receiving stereo broadcasts and Hi-Fi audio for getting the best sound from prerecorded or home-taped programs. What really makes this a boon for time-shifters is the easy index search system and intro-search feature that lets you find any program you've put onto one tape with a minimum of hassle.

In terms of performance, this is a fine deck, showing the excellent picture resolution that's a hallmark of the S-VHS format, combined with really first-rate video signal-to-noise ratios, assuring that the detail of your picture won't be compromised by undue grain or snow. This also has one of the better built-in MTS decoders we've tested, with stereo separation high enough to produce an impressive aural image. There are more features on this deck than we've mentioned here; suffice it to say that the HR-S5000U has enough of them to keep you busy for a while. And its on-screen menus make it a snap to use—another plus in a family VCR.

FEATURES

Among the highlights of this deck are, of course, the sharp resolution of the S-VHS format, which JVC augments with a CCD luminance (brightness) comb filter for improved detail in the brightness signal. This deck also has four video heads and a tape stabilizing head drum that cuts down the vertical jitter sometimes visible in a home video image. There's also an audio noise reducing system that attacks the problem at the tape-

head switching point and a flying erase head for clean edits. Audio recording is in the conventional and Hi-Fi modes, the latter providing the finest sound.

Special effects include freeze-frame and frame-by-frame advance; slow-motion at five different speeds; variable speed search at 3, 5, 7 and 21 (in EP mode only) times normal speed, both backward and forward; double-speed playback and shuttle search.

The tuner is cable compatible and can

receive 155 channel frequencies. A built-in MTS decoder receives stereo and SAP broadcast signals. The 14-day/eight-event timer (with selectable daily settings) has on-screen programming, which makes taping while you're away a fairly simple operation.

LAB MEASUREMENTS:

JVC S-VHS VCR

Model Number: **HR-S5000U**

Serial Number: **05**

VIDEO SECTION

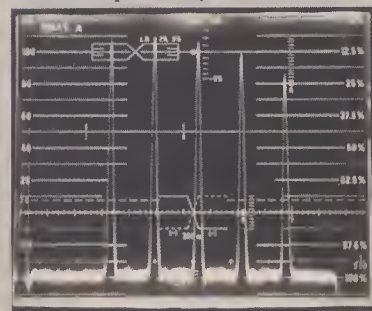
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 4.20 MHz)

Video Output	
SP	-3.37 dB
EP	-4.86 dB
TV Output	
SP	-7.36 dB
EP	-9.30 dB

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chromo (video output)	
SP (AM/PM)	48.4/43.0 dB
EP (AM/PM)	43.5/40.5 dB
Red-Field Chroma (TV output)	
SP (AM/PM)	45.2/42.1 dB
EP (AM/PM)	42.2/39.8 dB
Luminance (video output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	45.7/45.6/44.6 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.8/42.6/41.5 dB
Luminance (TV output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.9/42.9/42.2 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	41.1/40.9/40.6 dB

Stairstep Linearity (video output)



Tape access features include a half-loading mechanism that cuts down the waiting time between transport modes (play, fast-forward, etc.), the recently introduced VHS index search system for marking and finding desired points on a tape, index search (which plays back about 5 seconds of each indexed program), real-time access (punch in the desired section by time and the machine finds that point, whereupon playback begins) and skip search (which goes over unwanted segments, from 1/2 to 2 minutes in length).

CONTROLS

Since many of the functions on this VCR are called up via the on-screen menus, a minimum number of controls and switches are found on the VCR's front panel. In fact, when you first unpack the VCR, the only visible control is the power button! Two swing-down panels and a small hinged panel at the extreme left of the machine conceal all other controls. The small left panel has a

headphone jack and volume control and a microphone input jack. The larger panel has major tape-transport controls, channel up/down buttons, indexing controls, program storing controls, buttons for moving the cursor during on-screen menu operation and more. All of these are on the inner wall of the panel door, so they can be worked from a standing position. Near the hinged portion of the door are controls for TV/video selection, counter memory, VHS/S-VHS selection and the menu button, as well as other controls. On the vertical surface behind the door are controls related to Hi-Fi audio recording and video dubbing. A switch here determines whether the AC receptacle on the rear panel is powered at all times or only when the VCR is on.

The last door is on the lower right of the front panel and hides such picture controls as tracking and sharpness. The display area above these controls shows a wide variety of status indications. The supplied remote duplicates almost all the functions on the

VCR and adds a numeric keypad for direct channel access. The rear panel has the usual complement of video and antenna jacks, the S-video ins and outs and two sets of direct audio outputs, as well as the channel 3/4 switch and the AC receptacle.

TEST RESULTS

We were pretty impressed with the overall performance of this deck. While APEL's frequency sweep test showed frequency response extending all the way out to 5 MHz, the measurements that impressed us occurred at 4.2 MHz, where response at the SP speed through the video output was down only 3.37 dB. That's considered very good at the conventional VHS frequency of 2.0 MHz. What this means to the layperson is that this deck delivers picture detail that's simply unheard of in the long-popular conventional VHS format, and yes, the difference is very noticeable.

Adding to the good news, the deck delivered superb signal-to-noise ratios (48.4 dB for AM chroma at the SP speed, video out; 45.7 luminance at 100 IRE, SP, video out). Both color and brightness came across without a lot of annoying grain or snow. While stairstep linearity has been a major problem on many S-VHS decks, here it was only a minor problem. Maximum deviation got as high as 16%, which is not good, but a bit better than we've seen on other S-VHS decks. This means the shades of gray between black and white aren't reproduced with the utmost accuracy; this didn't detract too much from our enjoyment of the overall picture. Color purity and saturation were, fortunately, pretty close to perfect.

As usual, VHS Hi-Fi results showed crystalline sound quality, with full frequency response and CD-quality signal-to-noise ratio (91.5 dB at SP). Conventional audio tracks were conventional, although in the SP speed response went unusually high (14.5 kHz, about the limit of MTS stereo and FM broadcasts). Still, for musical or archival recording, we recommend the Hi-Fi mode.

We were very happy with the built-in MTS decoder. It featured excellent stereo separation (always in the area of 30 dB), a good signal-to-noise ratio (over 65 dB) and acceptable frequency response (out to 12 kHz, which misses some of the higher highs). We wish all built-in MTS decoders were so consistent.

With first-rate decks like this on the market, we'd say the S-VHS format is really trying to work its way into the video mainstream. Furthermore, we feel that video software companies are missing a sound bet by adamantly resisting the format. But just because the software companies have to catch up, that's no reason for you to wait—the S-VHS format allows you to make your own tapes with near-broadcast quality resolution. The HR-S5000U makes it easy, and its features make it fun as well.—Len Feldman

Color Accuracy (video output)



AUDIO SECTION

OUTPUT LEVEL

Conventional (SP/EP)	.35/.39 Volts
Hi-Fi (both speeds)	3.0 Volts

THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT

Conventional (SP/EP)	1.8/2.78%
Hi-Fi (both speeds)	1.0%

WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)

Conventional	
SP (avg/peak)	.28/.30%
EP (avg/peak)	.55/.65%
Hi-Fi	
SP (avg/peak)	.015/.018%
EP (avg/peak)	.025/.030%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)

Conventional	
SP	130 Hz to 14.5 kHz
EP	125 Hz to 6.8 kHz
Hi-Fi (both speeds)	20 Hz to 20 kHz

HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)

Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	
SP	1.82/.51%
EP	1.33/.85%
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	
SP	.23/.26/1.06%
EP	.24/.25/1.07%

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Conventional (SP/EP)	51.8/49.5 dB
Hi-Fi (SP/EP)	91.5/90.5 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)

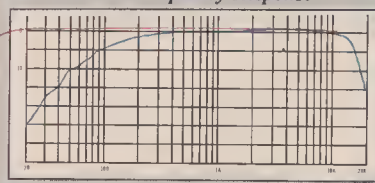
Hi-Fi	
SP	75.6/67.6 dB
EP	75.7/68.0 dB

MTS DECODER SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

(at 100% modulation)	
Stereo (left/right)	66.0/65.1 dB
SAP	72.5 dB
Mono	67.2 dB

Hi-Fi Frequency Response



TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	.41/.43%
SAP	.27%
Mono	.35%

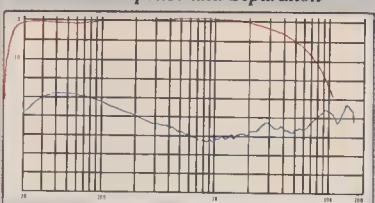
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB)

Stereo	50 Hz to 12 kHz
SAP	30 Hz to 10 kHz
Mono	50 Hz to 3 kHz

CHANNEL SEPARATION (at -20 dB)

Stereo (left/right)	29.5/30.5 kHz
---------------------	---------------

MTS Response and Separation



ADDITIONAL DATA

POWER REQUIREMENTS

	39.0 Watts
--	------------

FAST-FORWARD TIME

(T-120 tape)	4 Min., 50 Sec.
--------------	-----------------

FAST-REWIND TIME

(T-120 tape)	4 Min., 57 Sec.
--------------	-----------------

DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches)	4'1/8" x 17'1/8" x 8"
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WEIGHT

	18 Pounds
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SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

	\$1,299
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All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY

Sony VHS VCP, Model SLV-P30HF

When Sony announced it was finally going to begin manufacturing and marketing VHS decks after long years of touting its much-beloved Beta format, the video world went into shock. We're glad that Sony is still standing behind Beta and refining the already exemplary format with ED (extended definition) Beta. But we're also pleased to see Sony start working with the world's most popular video format and competing in that big market.

Naturally, when *Video Review* heard about Sony's move, we were dying to get a first look at one of its VHS decks. And the first one we got to see is this, the SLV-P30HF. This Hi-Fi model is a videocassette *player*, obviously intended as either a reasonably priced (\$500 list) second deck for the home, or as a stand-alone deck for people whose sole interest in video is watching prerecorded cassettes. Given its deliberate limitations, this is a fine VCP, perfectly suited to these uses. Video and Hi-Fi audio performance were both well above average, and the deck's few convenience features were all helpful and easy to use. Our only complaint is that the on-screen displays and menus work only when the deck is hooked up via the antenna output, not the direct video output. But all in all, this player could be just the ticket for consumers who want a small, useful addition to their hardware array. And it makes us eager to get a look at one of Sony's full-featured VHS VCRs!

FEATURES

Put a cassette in this player's slot and the deck powers up immediately; the tape will automatically rewind and play back. Even eject and power-off are automatic. On-screen displays include a linear time counter with readout of tape position in hours, minutes and seconds, as well as a bar display that shows how much tape remains.

If the videotape you're watching has preprogrammed index points, the deck has an index search feature that will take you to those points. One on-screen menu, available only when the player is in stop mode, offers six operating combinations, such as "rewind-play," "play-rewind-stop," "play-rewind-stop-power-off," etc. This is great for viewers who don't want to leave the com-

fort of their couch for anything!

As for effects, this deck has double-speed playback with sound, high-speed search, freeze-frame, slow-motion and frame-by-frame advance. Because recording circuitry and a tuner didn't have to be incorporated into this model, it's extremely compact, measuring only 14 inches wide.

CONTROLS

Because this is just a player, the front-panel layout is considerably simpler than that of a full VCR. There's a power switch and a miniature headphone jack at the left and an audio level display below the cassette slot. The eject button is to the right of the slot.

The tape transport controls are clustered conveniently at the right end of the panel.

Below these controls is a small swing-down panel that covers secondary controls such as tracking, picture sharpness and headphone level. The tape transport buttons are also duplicated on the slim remote, which also features buttons for counter reset, index point access and several other controls.

The rear panel is equipped with two sets

LAB MEASUREMENTS:

Sony VHS VCP
Model Number: **SLV-P30HF**
Serial Number: **NA**

VIDEO SECTION

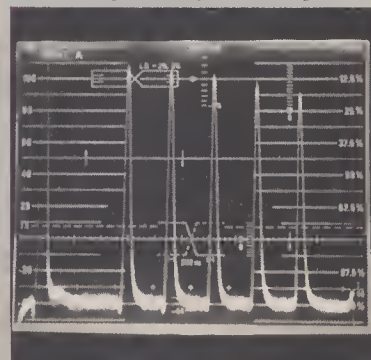
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 2.0 MHz)

Video Output	
SP	-4.03 dB
EP	-8.94 dB
TV Output	
SP	-4.65 dB
EP	-8.12 dB

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chroma (video output)	
SP (AM/PM)	44.5/39.5 dB
EP (AM/PM)	37.6/35.5 dB
Red-Field Chroma (TV output)	
SP (AM/PM)	43.2/39.3 dB
EP (AM/PM)	36.9/34.5 dB
Luminance (video output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	48.4/48.2/48.4 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	43.6/45.6/46.7 dB
Luminance (TV output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.9/43.0/41.9 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	41.5/43.3/44.1 dB

Stairstep Linearity (video output)



of audio/video output jacks, VHF antenna input and output connectors and connection points to allow interfacing with other Sony video decks.

TEST RESULTS

Video frequency response at 2 MHz was down by 4.03 dB in the SP mode through the video out. Through the TV out at SP, response was down 4.65 dB—not too much difference. Results at the slow (EP) speed

Color Accuracy (video output)



AUDIO SECTION

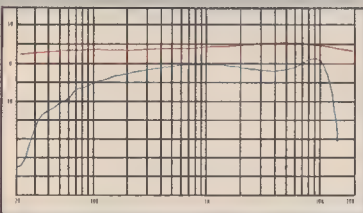
(SP mode only)

OUTPUT LEVEL	
Conventional	.30 Volts
Hi-Fi	1.70 Volts

THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT	
Conventional	2.9%
Hi-Fi (both speeds)	3.0%

WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)	
Conventional (avg/peak)	.40/.45%
Hi-Fi (avg/peak)	.055/.065%

Hi-Fi Frequency Response



FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)	
Conventional	150 Hz to 12 kHz
Hi-Fi	20 Hz to 20 kHz

HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)	
Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	.99/.35%
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	.63/.12/.54%

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	
Conventional	50.5 dB
Hi-Fi	72.6 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)	
Hi-Fi	62.3/64.6 dB

ADDITIONAL DATA

POWER REQUIREMENTS	22.0 Watts
---------------------------	------------

FAST-FORWARD TIME (T-120 tape)	3 Min., 11 Sec.
--	-----------------

FAST-REWIND TIME (T-120 tape)	3 Min., 18 Sec.
---	-----------------

DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	3 1/4 x 13 1/4 x 13 1/4
---	-------------------------

WEIGHT	12 1/4 Pounds
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SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$500
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All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

were not as good—down 8.94 dB via the video out. In any case, these results are satisfactory enough to ensure that tapes you watch on this machine will be well detailed within the limits of the conventional VHS format. Signal-to-noise ratios on this deck were quite good overall, going particularly high in the luminance (brightness) area: In the SP mode through the video out, the signal-to-noise ratio here was above 48 dB whether measured at 100, 50 or 10 IRE. So the amount of visible video noise will be negligible.

In the stairstep linearity test (which determines how well the deck reproduces the shades of gray between black and white) this VCP did well, with maximum deviation reaching only 11%. Color purity was slightly off, with the green bar, for example, shifting slightly towards cyan. Of course, a problem of this sort can be eased by shifting the hue control on your TV set.

The Hi-Fi audio circuitry was excellent as usual, with wide stereo separation, a signal-to-noise ratio of 72.7 dB—not as great as some we've seen, but good nonetheless—and response extending across the range of human hearing. Conventional audio tracks showed good response at the high end—a rare 12 kHz—but didn't get terrific bass, what with a rolloff of 3 db at 150 Hz.

We should note that since this is solely a player, the test signals needed to take measurements had to be made on other decks. For SP speed tests, signals were recorded on a Panasonic industrial-grade deck, model AG6810; for EP tests, an NEC DX-2000U. Since results at the slower speed were more likely to be influenced by the recorder used (and therefore not reflect the capabilities of the player itself), you'll see that, in fairness, certain lab results are omitted in our charts.

Overall, we're impressed by this model, reflecting as it does not only Sony's engineering expertise but also the company's wide-ranging view of the video market. At a \$500 list, a player-only model with Hi-Fi is a good bet, and the fact that this is the only one of its kind we've seen makes it that much more intriguing. —Len Feldman

ABOUT THESE TEST REPORTS

Each piece of video equipment we test is a factory-fresh production model—the same quality you would buy in a store. After each product has been tested by APEL—Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory, a leading independent testing facility headed by engineer Frank Barr—it goes to technical editor Len Feldman, an internationally recognized authority with more than 30 years' experience testing home entertainment products. He interprets the data and performs hands-on use tests of each piece of equipment, combining personal, practical experience with the most objective technical data available anywhere.

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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY Magnavox S-VHS-C Camcorder, Model VR9260AV01

This model combines the high-resolution S-VHS format with the portability and lightness of the VHS-C format. While it gets high marks in the latter category, there are a couple of disappointments in terms of picture quality. Though the camera section alone got over 400 lines of horizontal resolution, resolution was 380 lines in the actual record/play cycle. That's still very good, and far more detailed than what you would get from a conventional VHS or 8mm camcorder. What gave us pause were the poor signal-to-noise ratios at the minimum light level (which was 7 lux). While chroma (color) was acceptable, luminance (brightness) was quite low: only 31.8 dB. This means shooting in dim lighting conditions with this camcorder will result in pictures that suffer from a distracting amount of graininess. Under good lighting conditions, things improved a lot. But if you plan on doing a lot of impromptu shooting with this camcorder, a video lamp of some sort is a must.

In every other respect, the VR9260AV01 is a fine camcorder—easy to use, easy to carry. We found the zone auto focus to be very accurate and fast and the convenience features solid, making this a good aim-and-shoot model.

FEATURES

We mentioned zone auto focus in the summary. This has two settings: full and point. Full is for everything within a shot, point for focusing on a small object within a larger scene. Like most full-featured camcorders, the VR9260 provides automatic white balance and iris adjustment. The variable speed shutter has settings for $\frac{1}{250}$, $\frac{1}{500}$ and $\frac{1}{1000}$ of a second, letting you take outdoor action shots and freeze them without blur. The flying erase head produces clean in-camera or insert edits.

The electronic viewfinder serves as a minimonitor for in-camera playback and provides a wide variety of status indications while shooting. The AC adapter lets you power the camcorder directly and serves as a charger for the supplied battery. For full compatibility between this camcorder and a full-size S-VHS deck, a cassette adapter for the S-VHS-C tape is supplied.

CONTROLS

Most controls associated with camera operation are arranged along the left side of

the camcorder body. Included here are the focus zone and mode switch, white balance selector (three settings: indoor, outdoor and automatic), backlight compensation switch, high-speed shutter selector, date/time superimposer and fade control.

Power, cassette eject, speed selector (SP provides 20 minutes of recording; EP, one hour), index (which electronically marks a portion of the recording) and other related switches are on the camcorder's rear surface. A sliding panel on the back reveals VCR-related functions, including tape transport controls, video/audio dub controls as well as a connector for the AC adapter. The battery pack (often found on the rear of a camcorder) slips onto the right side of the VR9260AV01, neatly completing the handgrip area. The pack itself has a smoothly curved surface. When it's in place you'd never guess it wasn't part of the camcorder structure itself.

Atop the handgrip is a run/stop button and a rocker switch for the zoom lens. This configuration is different from what we normally find and means that the forefinger or in-



dex finger has to be shifted from the zoom switch to start or stop taping, which we found a bit awkward.

Connectors for the RF adapter, wired remote and S-video output are on the right side, as are tracking adjustment buttons.

TEST RESULTS

The minimum illumination required to get a 1-volt video signal to this camcorder was 7 lux. But again we must emphasize that relatively noise-free pictures can only be received in better conditions than that; signal-to-noise ratios at minimum light conditions were disappointingly low. White balance was an acceptably low 7 IRE, and while color contamination (the amount of unwanted color showing up on a gray field) was 8 IRE through the camera-only output, it went down to a better 4 IRE going through the record/play cycle. Color purity, saturation and accuracy of hue were all excellent.

As you might expect, the most outstanding test results were those related to the S-VHS format, specifically horizontal resolution (which makes for enhanced picture detail). Through the direct video output, resolution was 380 lines, just 20 short of the full 400 promised by the format. Through the TV out, resolution was down to 340 lines. Both of these are still quite good, outstripping, in fact, the resolution transmitted by broadcast TV (although TV broadcasts are, in other areas, such as signal-to-noise ratios, better than what this format can deliver). Signal-to-noise ratios at optimum light levels were good but not extraordinary, the best being 43.6 dB chroma AM (color) through the direct video out.

Like all other VHS-C camcorders, this

one only has conventional audio recording capabilities. These performed adequately, with a signal-to-noise reading of 51.6 dB.

In our hands-on evaluations, we were pleased with the auto-focus system, which was accurate in both zone settings. The fade feature also performed well, though we wish it faded both audio and video simultaneously.

The list price of this camcorder is \$2,000, somewhat steep for many first-time camcorder buyers. But if you're eager to work in the S-VHS format but don't want to become a semipro maven to do so, this model warrants a look. Its facility and light weight make the outstanding picture detail of the S-VHS format accessible to any beginner. But watch out for those low-light situations!

—Len Feldman

LAB MEASUREMENTS

Magnavox S-VHS-C

Camcorder

Model Number:

VR9260AV01

Serial Number: 57764034

CAMERA SECTION

MINIMUM ILLUMINATION	7.0 Lux
HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION	420 Lines
COLOR CONTAMINATION	8 IRE
WHITE BALANCE	7 IRE
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (optimum/minimum illumination)	
Red-Field Chroma, AM	43.2/36.2 dB
Luminance	39.0/29.6 dB
MINIMUM FOCAL DISTANCE	42 inches (1/2 inch, macro)
LENS APERTURE	f1.2
ZOOM RATIO	6:1
FOCAL LENGTH	9mm to 54mm

AUDIO SECTION

MAXIMUM MIKE OUTPUT	.38 Volts
EXTERNAL MIKE SENSITIVITY	3.0 mv
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	51.6 dB

COMBINED PERFORMANCE

HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION (video/TV output)	380/340 Lines
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (optimum/minimum illumination)	
Red-Field Chroma, AM (video out)	43.6/38.0 dB
Luminance (video out)	41.0/31.8 dB
Red-Field Chroma, AM (TV out)	41.9/37.7 dB
Luminance (TV out)	41.2/32.7 dB

ADDITIONAL DATA

WEIGHT (including battery and tape)	4.0 Pounds
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	5 3/8 x 4 3/8 x 10 1/2
POWER ZOOM SPEED	6 Seconds
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$2,000

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

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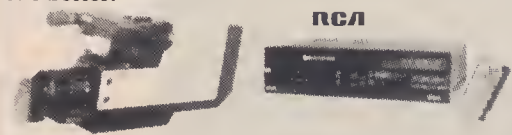
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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY

Tatung Monitor/Receiver, Model 2020CPX

Another entry in Tatung's Masterpiece series, this 20-inch monitor/receiver presents a classic good news/bad news scenario. Here's a set that offers a truly fine video picture, one with enough resolution to handle any high-quality video format. It will certainly do more than justice to broadcast-TV pictures. But what this set does with broadcast TV stereo signals is almost a crime. APEL tested two samples of the 2020CPX, and both exhibited severe problems in the built-in MTS decoder, which handles stereo-TV transmission. There was virtually no separation in the stereo mode, and distortion levels were very high in the stereo, SAP and mono modes. While Tatung's engineers obviously know quite a bit about video, they seem to have some trouble with the proper alignment of MTS circuitry. That's a shame, because the video quality of the set, its on-screen displays and the configuration of the remote were all impressive, and its list price (\$799) is attractive. But the poor performance of the built-in MTS decoder gives us serious qualms about the set.

FEATURES

This is a basic monitor/receiver as far as features go. The built-in tuner can receive all UHF and VHF frequencies and is cable compatible as well. TV signals in your area can be memorized so you don't have to scroll through unavailable channels when using the channel up/down buttons. There is one set each of direct audio/video ins and outs as well as terminals for external speaker connection (these speakers are driven by the set's built-in audio amplifier). Various operating adjustments are displayed on screen, and displays can be called up for channel number, input source, MTS mode and so on.

The built-in audio amplifier has separate bass and treble tone controls that can be adjusted via the remote, along with other video and audio parameters.

CONTROLS

The few controls visible beneath the TV screen are the power button, volume control and channel up/down buttons. Stereo and SAP indicator lights are also found here. A swing-down hinged panel at the bottom of the set conceals controls for MTS mode and TV/video selection as well as buttons needed to memorize TV channels. Channels can be programmed only on the set itself, not on

the supplied remote. The remote contains number keys for direct channel access and time setting; it also has an off-timer key, channel recall key (which jumps back from what you're watching to the previously selected channel) and a key that calls up the clock time. In addition, the remote duplicates a number of front panel controls.

The set's rear panel is equipped with the usual 75-ohm VHF and 300-ohm UHF antenna terminals, external speaker terminals and the direct audio/video inputs and outputs.

TEST RESULTS

Almost all the video measurements made by APEL were above average if not excellent. Maximum usable luminance was

LAB MEASUREMENTS:

Tatung Monitor/Receiver
Model Number: **2020CPX**
Serial Number: **NA**

VIDEO SECTION

MAXIMUM USABLE LUMINANCE	125 Footlamberts
RESOLUTION (horizontal/vertical)	560/400 Lines
CONVERGENCE (center/corners)	0/.4%
VIDEO FREQUENCY RESPONSE	7.0 MHz
INTERLACE	60/40
TRANSIENT RESPONSE	Excellent
BLACK LEVEL RETENTION	90%
COLOR QUALITY	Excellent

AUDIO SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO (at 1,000 uV, A-weighted)	
Stereo (left/right)	41.8/42.9 dB
SAP	37.9 dB
Mono	45.6 dB

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
--	--

Overscan



Stereo (left/right) 1.90/1.60%
SAP 1.30%
Mono .40%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

(at -20 dB, 100% modulation)

Stereo (see text)
5AP 20 Hz to 4 kHz
Mono 25 Hz to 3 kHz

CHANNEL SEPARATION

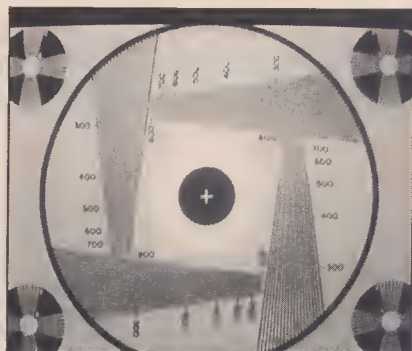
(at 1 kHz, 100% modulation)

Stereo (left/right) (see text)

AMPLIFIER SECTION

MAXIMUM OUTPUT

Audio Output 1.4 Volts



visible overscan (see chart), so the edges of the picture won't be cut off. Otherwise, every other video parameter (color reproduction, black level retention and so on) was top-notch.

The set's built-in amplifier did a good job overall, delivering flat frequency response across the human hearing range through the line output. Response from the speaker output was not so good, falling off at 12 kHz and thus missing some higher frequencies.

Now that brings us to the trouble spot on the MTS decoder. When we say there was

separation, we mean it. We tested, and APEL's separation or response [the lab commented in] was little or no separation left and right audio

much better in the SAP. We could get response going up to the frequency curve. Our usual -3 dB limit, to 3 kHz. Any way you look at MTS performance. We don't see SAP or mono performance like this, where the separation is actually non-existent, we don't see it. Too bad, because for the price, this is a fine set.

—Len Feldman

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| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Mitsubishi | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. RCA | |

B. Which brands of TV do you currently own?

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Name _____ Please print Phone (____) _____
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D. Do you use Pay Per View TV? ☐ Yes ☐ No

E. Do you own or plan to buy a Satellite Dish? ☐ Yes ☐ No

F. When viewing a video at home, do you consume?

(Check all that apply):

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
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TEST REPORTS



Tatung M

Another entry in the classic good news, bad news category, one with enough features to do more than just cast TV stereo signals and both exhibited some TV transmission. The picture levels were very good. The engineers obviously did their homework with the proper alignment of the set, its on-screen display is impressive, and its list of features in MTS decoder gives

FEATU

This is a basic monitor with a lot of features go. The built-in features include all UHF and VHF frequencies compatible as well. TV channels can be memorized so you can switch through unavailable channels with the channel up/down buttons. Each of direct audio/video inputs as well as terminals for external connection (these speakers are built-in). The set's built-in audio amplifier has operating adjustments are controls and displays can be calibrated for number, input source, M

the supplied remote. The remote contains number keys for direct channel access and time setting; it also has an off-timer key, channel recall key (which jumps back from what you're watching to the previously

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Stereo (left/right)	1.90/1.60%
SAP	1.30%
Mono	.40%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

(at -20 dB, 100% modulation)

Stereo	(see text)
SAP	20 Hz to 4 kHz
Mono	25 Hz to 3 kHz

CHANNEL SEPARATION

(at 1 kHz, 100% modulation)

Stereo (left/right)	(see text)
---------------------	------------

AMPLIFIER SECTION

MAXIMUM OUTPUT

Audio Output	1.4 Volts
Speaker Output	3.8 Watts

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(1 kHz, at -10 dB)

Audio Output	.1%
Speaker Output	.19%

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(A-weighted)

Audio Output	76.1 dB
Speaker Output	61.9 dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Audio Output	20 Hz to 20 kHz
Speaker Output	38 Hz to 12 kHz

ADDITIONAL DATA

PICTURE SIZE	20 Inches (diag.)
--------------	-------------------

POWER REQUIREMENTS	78 Watts
--------------------	----------

DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches)	18½x19½x18½
--------------------	-------------

WEIGHT	70 Pounds
--------	-----------

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$799
------------------------	-------

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

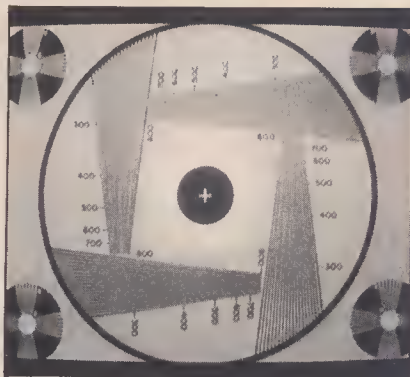


Fig. 1. Resolution: excellent.

125 footlamberts, and that's fine for any room, no matter what kind of lighting it has. Horizontal resolution was a superb 560 lines, corresponding to a usable video frequency response of 7 MHz (see Fig. 1). This set will give you the full picture detail from such high-resolution sources as a laser disc player or an S-VHS or ED Beta deck. Be advised, though, that this set does not have the much-vaunted S-connector that's a part of the last two formats.

Color convergence on the set was perfect at the center and off by a negligible .4% at the corners. Interlace was off slightly—60/40 as opposed to a perfect 50/50, and some discerning viewers detect this as a slight "vertical blind" effect. There was no

visible overscan (see chart), so the edges of the picture won't be cut off. Otherwise, every other video parameter (color reproduction, black level retention and so on) was top-notch.

The set's built-in amplifier did a good job overall, delivering flat frequency response across the human hearing range through the line output. Response from the speaker output was not so good, falling off at 12 kHz and thus missing some higher frequencies.

Now that brings us to the trouble spot on the MTS decoder. When we say there was virtually no stereo separation, we mean it. Two samples were tested, and APEL couldn't get stereo separation or response from either one. As the lab commented in its report: "[There was] little or no separation between the left and right audio channels."

Things were not much better in the SAP mode, where we could get response going out to 4 kHz only by providing a tolerance of plus or minus 6 dB to the frequency curve. In mono, reverting to our usual -3 dB limit, we got response out to 3 kHz. Any way you slice it, this is bad MTS performance. We rarely gripe about poor SAP or mono performance, but in a case like this, where the so-called stereo is virtually non-existent, we must call attention to it. Too bad, because in many other respects, this is a fine set.

—Len Feldman

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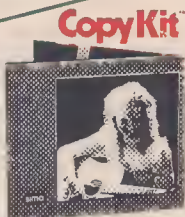


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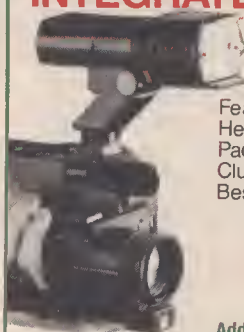
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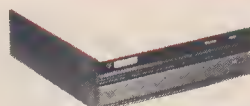
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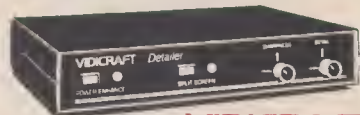
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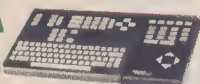
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VR-12A



AN AMATEUR SYSTEM GOES DOLBY PRO

Nobody expects perfection, but can adding the latest in Dolby Pro Logic to a “mid-fi” (read: average) A/V system actually yield positive results? Is it worth the investment? After a bit of tinkering and a battery of viewing/listening tests, my jury of video buffs returned an overwhelmingly positive verdict.

Pro Logic, which adds sound-steering circuits to the popular Dolby Surround mode, more closely approximates the theater sound experience. The steering logic directs sound to the speakers—left, right, rear and center—relative to the action on the screen.

The Yamaha DSR-100 Pro includes Dolby Pro Logic decoding circuitry but little else. At the component’s initial press demonstration in New York, a Yamaha product manager explained that “the company thought about including Dolby Pro in its DSP-3000 digital sound-field processor—but it would have made the product too expensive.” So, this outboard Pro Logic component with simple volume, delay time (20 or 30 milliseconds) and balance controls was born.

I wanted to try the basic product on its own, without the sound-field processor that it normally hooks up to. For reference in my evaluations, I first integrated the DSR-100 Pro into a true Hi-Fi A/V system: Pioneer LaserVision player, a GE Hi-Fi VCR, a 25-inch NEC monitor and professional 200-watt studio amplifiers. With four three-way speakers and a subwoofer, I succeeded in re-creating the theater experience: The landlord shined a flashlight in my face and barked, “Quiet or you’re outta here!”

Which brings up one of the first things you notice when playing a movie on a Pro Logic

system: Volume is nice. The primary dialogue, which Pro Logic steers to the center channel, frequently overpowers the effects and music coming from the satellite speakers. The additional Dolby information only teases you if you keep the volume low. You find yourself leaning left and right to pick up those snippets of off-screen sound. Boosting the volume solves the problem, but that’s the easy way out.

By adjusting the preampli-



fiers, playing with the rear and center level controls on the Yamaha and attenuating the center output (there’s a switch on the back), I managed to strike a most satisfying four-way balance that barely rattled the windows. After an exhilarating test screening of *The Empire Strikes Back* on LV disc (CAV), we were

ready for the little league—our “mid-fi” hookup.

Before the guests arrived, we stationed the 26-inch JVC monitor/receiver (along with the Yamaha, a strong link in a weak chain) at the far end of a 15x25-foot room with the furniture in the middle. A set of two-way JBL speakers went in the front—one in each corner—while a weathered set of Lafayette public-address-system speakers went against the rear walls. The amps: a 25-year-old, 35-watt-per-channel Fisher

tube job in the front and a 20-year-old, 12-watt Lafayette in the rear. Again, I routed the center channel through the TV.

At first, worn potentiometers made balance adjustments difficult. But, after these were set, I only needed to adjust the Yamaha’s remote master

receiver. The showing proved more successful than expected (*L.A.* jumped from a two-star to a three-star movie). Dolby Surround elevated *L.A.*’s sensory assault to a level that balanced its pretentiousness.

To the Yamaha’s credit, center-channel information was focused throughout. The Pro Logic steering allows you to place the front speakers farther away from the monitor, opening the viewing area. In dialogue-heavy scenes and close-ups, the center-channel LED

remains the most active.

I’d selected the 20 ms delay setting for the initial showing, based on the relatively equal distance between the audience and both sets of speakers (front and rear). In quick 20/30 ms tests, however, the assembly seemed to prefer the added echo of the 30 ms setting. But after more discussion and tests, the 20 ms setting won out. This initial preference for the inappropriate has a parallel in audio—people frequently mistake exaggerated treble for clarity.

Through it all, the mediocre fidelity of the VCR, amp and speakers didn’t seem to matter. While the DSR-100 Pro shined brilliantly when connected to the true Hi-Fi system, it also added substantially to a “mid-fi” setup with older equipment. Considering the component’s price, you could add Pro Logic—plus the extra speakers and amps of a full home theater system—for less than a thousand bucks. If you watch a lot of movies, it’s a sound investment. —Gregory P. Fagan

FACT FINDER

Product: Dolby Pro Logic Decoder

Model: DSR-100 Pro

Manufacturer: Yamaha

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I SAW MOMMY SHOOTING SANTA CLAUS

Even if your camcorder's been sitting around gathering dust all year (which, if you're a regular reader of this column, is highly unlikely), odds are very good that the home movie machine will start getting a pretty good workout soon. The holidays—Thanksgiving, Hanuka, Christmas and, of course, Wright Brothers Day (December 17—you can look it up) are all looming upon us, and with them will come the inevitable cries of "Put that thing away! We're eating!"

Getting all those precious holiday memories on tape can be a snap—an unobtrusive snap, even—if you do a little planning. Take Thanksgiving, for instance. If you've been on this earth long enough to know how to run a camcorder, you've probably experienced more than a few Thanksgiving celebrations, so you know how they go. But the process of getting the feast together and having everyone gathered at the table to eat it is a story in and of itself, and that story can give a very pleasing structure to your Thanksgiving videotape. Even the slimmest narrative structure is preferable to simply aiming the camcorder at the assembled diners and shouting, "Do something!" Remember, the more structure you build in-camera, the less editing you'll have to do later.

You can start the night before, with a look at the fabulous turkey that, less than 24 hours later, will baste in its own juices till golden brown, provided you don't burn it. Get up nice and early the next day and tape the kids setting the table. Later, get a shot of the stuffing being prepared. Shots

of the arriving guests are optional; some folks prefer being greeted at the door by a person rather than a camcorder. It's a better idea to introduce your guests after they've had the chance to get their coats off and settle down. If you really have to identify them on tape (but why would you invite people you don't know over for Thanksgiving?) you can add voice-over narration later.

The idea is to divide the whole day into a series of scenes. One thing about traditional gatherings is that they're essentially predictable; you know, more or less, how they're going to go. Use this to your advantage when you make your tape, and use the time in between your shooting sprees to relax and enjoy the day. It'll make for less wear and tear on

you, and it'll make for a more watchable video memento.

If you want to give your tape a little more spice, invite participation from the people you're shooting. Example: After dinner, while everyone's still at the table having coffee and conversation, do a little opinion poll. With Thanksgiving, you could have each person at the table tell what they were thankful for over the year. The natural hams in your clan will eat up this performance opportunity. And besides being fun, this is a very revealing personality test that weeds out the sincere and warm family members from the piggish and greedy ones.

Deck the Halls

Christmas is a bit more difficult to plan for, shooting-

wise. This is particularly true if you've got small kids in the house—you never know when they're going to wake up and rush under the tree to open their presents. And, of course, hand-held camerawork can get pretty erratic in the flurry of unwrapping. A lot of Christmas tapes of this sort consist of nothing but whip pans (fast back-and-forth camera movements) going from face to happy face—plus you're so busy taping that the kids can't thank "Santa" properly.

Here's a very simple way you might be able to avoid this. Set your camcorder on a tripod and put it in a corner of your living room—close enough to the action to get a nice medium shot but far enough so that the kids won't trip over your equipment as they run for the loot. Then, rather than having to gather all your shooting stuff as you groggily surmise from the patter of little feet that Christmas has indeed arrived, you only have to stumble downstairs, power the camcorder and hit the start button (provided, of course, that you've remembered to charge the battery and insert a tape the night before). Then, just let the camcorder go, pausing every now and then to change camera placement—different angles will cut down on tedium. A big advantage of this approach is that it allows you to participate, and that's what family gatherings are all about, right?

The box below has a few tips on some of the technical challenges you might encounter in your holiday shooting—ways to make sure that no matter what you choose to shoot, it comes out looking good. Just remember: stay in focus and have a happy holiday season. □

TIPS FOR HOLIDAY SHOOTING

Be Extra Careful About White Balance. If you're going to do a tracking shot from one room to another, remember that natural light (coming from windows) will mix with interior lighting. If you've got your white balance switch set on one of these individual settings, some parts of your movie will have a blue, unrealistic tint to them. If the fully automatic white balance setting on your camcorder is reliable, use that; if not, it may be a good idea to reset white balance manually before each scene.

Maintain Focus. This seems like a simple enough proposition, but if you're panning across a table, shooting a lineup of each family member, differences in people's sizes

(and seat placement) can confuse the auto-focus mechanism, which may overcompensate for only slight variations in depth. You might want to set the focus manually before beginning the shot; this way you can make the tiny adjustments from person to person with a minimum of fuss.

Know When to Stop. The rush of children tearing the wrapping paper off their presents, the grisly spectacle of Uncle Fester butchering the Thanksgiving turkey—these are the moments you really want to capture. Whether you want to chronicle the subsequent wreckage and dishwashing is up to you, but it's a cinch that not many people will want to sit through the playback of *that*.

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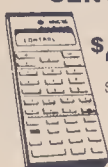
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THE CABLE CONNECTION

Let's have a quick show of hands of everybody out there who has cable TV. Okay, now, everybody who actually *likes* their reception, keep your hands up. There aren't many of you, are there?

Most videophiles I know have a love/hate relationship with cable TV: They love the selection of channels and the convenience, but they hate the mediocre picture quality, the rolling lines, the static and the outages that only seem to occur when they're trying to record their all-time favorite movie.

Can anything be done to improve the quality of cable TV? Plenty, but unfortunately most of it has to be done at the **head end**—the central receiving office of the cable company. After all, without a good signal to begin with, the best cable amplifiers and wires in the world can't bring a decent picture into your home. Unfortunately, many cable companies operate under severe budgetary constraints and don't use state-of-the-art gear.

Among the most common cable-reception problems, perhaps the biggest is **snow**, or **video noise**, which is generally caused by inadequate signal levels. Most experts agree that an average tuner needs at least .1 millivolt of signal to produce an acceptable picture and that a little more, say around 3 mv, is even better.

To combat snow, cable companies routinely use booster amplifiers placed at regular intervals in their lines, so that people far away from their headquarters will, theoretically, get reception as good as the people who live a block from the head end. But if your cable pictures are marred by snow

and ghosts, you've probably got a weak signal.

What to do? Radio Shack and several other accessory companies make VHF/UHF signal amplifiers that strengthen weak cable signals, but it's easy to misset them. Experiment carefully and make sure the reception is clean on *all* channels to determine the best setting for your system. (This is especially important when connecting more than two or three devices to one cable signal.)

If a little signal is good, then a lot of signal must be even better, right? Wrong. In VHF/UHF cable transmissions, the biggest loss is with the high frequencies, especially channels 25 and up. Cable-company amplifiers use special "tilt" equalization to help peak these frequencies, which helps reduce the loss over a long distance. However, if the cable amps are improperly adjusted the low-band channels (2 to 13) suffer, resulting in a lot of ghosting and **intercarrier interference** (the annoying buzzing you hear when bright titles pop on the screen). Another symptom of excessive signals is "tearing," when bright signals streak or smear from one side of the screen to the other. You can cut back on the cable line's signal with an inexpensive device called an **attenuator**, an in-line metal barrel that screws directly between your cable and the tuner input. It works by reducing signal strength with an electrical filter, sort of like an adjustable spray nozzle on a garden hose.

Also problematic is **ground-loop hum**, which shows up as large horizontal bars rolling through the picture. Usually these roll rather slowly, a sign

of 60-hertz hum (the same frequency as AC current).

Ground-loop video hum occurs when your house current is grounded differently from the cable system's, and it's often accompanied by low-frequency audio hum or buzzing.

One solution for this common cable ailment is a **dual-in-line transformer**, which you can make yourself for less than \$5. This consists of two 75-ohm-to-300-ohm transformers (also known as "baluns"), which are included free with virtually every VCR to help connect them to older TV sets. To make a dual-in-line transformer, simply connect the four 300-ohm leads on two baluns together, so that the round 75-ohm terminals are open. The cable-TV signal goes into one end, and the other end hooks up to your VCR or TV set. *Voila*: The hum is gone, since this double transformer breaks the cable's ground and isolates it.

Some cheaply made baluns that don't use transformers may not fix your hum problem. Fortunately, Gemini Electronics (215 Entin Rd., Clifton, NJ 07014) manufactures a direct 75-to-75-ohm "ground-breaker" (model CV89). This device is virtually guaranteed to get rid of hum from all but the worst cable systems and with less signal loss than the above method.

And, if all else fails, call up your cable company and complain.

[Special thanks to VR reader Bob Katz of New York, NY, for providing some background information for this column. Correction: Nortronics, mentioned in my last column as a maker of head cleaners, now goes under the name Geneva.] □



Simple solution to cable "ground-loop hum": Make your own dual-in-line transformer.

Take two 75-ohm-to-300-ohm transformers (usually supplied with your VCR) and connect the four 300-ohm leads (or screw ends) together. Hook up the completed transformer between your incoming cable and your TV set or VCR. Say goodbye hum.

...CHRISTMAS VIDEOS

Continued from page 63

youngsters and adults in various productions throughout the US as well as Europe. Regrettably, George Balanchine's nonpareil version for the New York City Ballet (premiered in 1952 and revived annually since then) has yet to make it to video. But there's a worthy second-best version as choreographed and danced by Mikhail Baryshnikov for American Ballet Theatre and taped in London with Gelsey Kirkland as the leading ballerina (MGM/UA cassette, \$19.95; Pioneer Artists LV disc, \$34.95). This is where video can really make a difference in getting to know and appreciate a classic art form, especially for younger viewers. Seeing it *before* attending a live performance (even of a different production) can offset possible seating disadvantages in a real theater

as well as help to focus attention on the storyline or characterization ahead of time; seeing it *afterward* can bring the ballet vividly back to life many times as well as clarify elements that may have been missed in the panorama of a live performance.

VINTAGE CARTOONS

Roger Rabbit and his pals may make the toon characters of bygone years seem hopelessly innocent (and outrageously dated) if you're an adult, but the smallest fry in your family will find a lot to chuckle over in *Christmas Comes But Once a Year* (Shokus cassette, \$12.95 until December 31), a collection of seven short color cartoons from the late '30s and early '40s (mostly from the Fleischers' *Noveltoons* and *Screen Songs* series), including "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Also on the same cassette is a *Howdy Doody*

program from 1952, in sepia tone, in which Howdy and Clarabell rescue Santa Claus from a miscreant who's holding him prisoner at the North Pole on Christmas Eve. It's short on production values but long on charm and amiability.

Also in the warm and friendly department is a special *Sing Along Songs* featurette from the Disney Studios: *Very Merry Christmas Songs* (Disney cassette, \$14.95). In this one, our old friends Mickey Mouse and the gang offer spirited versions of some 12 holiday favorites, including "The 12 Days of Christmas" and "Deck the Halls." □

Creative Programming Inc. is at 30 E. 60th St., New York, NY 10022. Shokus Video is at P. O. Box 8434, Van Nuys, CA 91409. United Home Video is at 4111 S. Darlington St., Tulsa, OK 74135.

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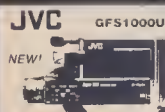
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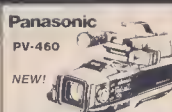
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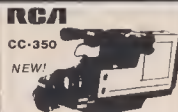
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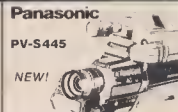
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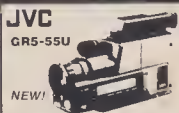
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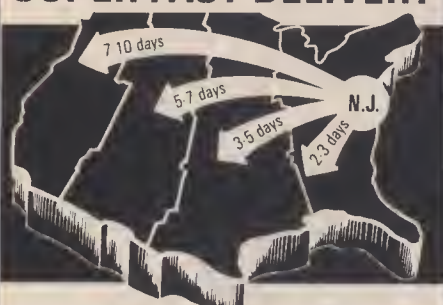
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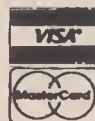
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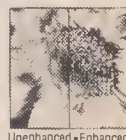
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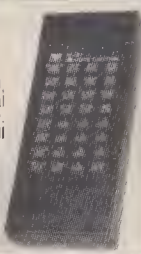
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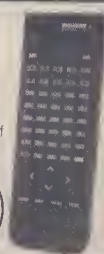


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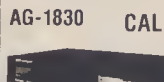
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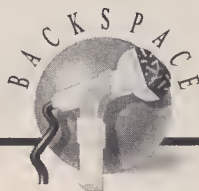
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MTS Stereo: What It Is and What It Should Be

BY FRANK BARR

In December, 1983, when the various factions of the video and TV broadcast industries met in Washington to finalize standards for stereo television, hopes were high. They settled on an ingenious technology developed by Zenith (with circuitry for "companding," a form of noise reduction, from dbx) that promised to deliver stereo sound roughly on a par with good FM stereo radio transmissions. Better yet, the system—now known as MTS (multichannel television sound)—would include an extra channel (SAP, or second audio program) for bilingual or other soundtracks and wouldn't interfere at all with the mono reception of existing sets.

It has now been over four years since the first MTS TV sets hit the market. How far has stereo come in those years? Not very far, I'm afraid. In fact, our high hopes for stereo TV have turned to dismay. While TV manufacturers have done a good job of making MTS TV sets and VCRs available to the public, the audio performance of those models has left us underwhelmed.

Only months after the FCC approved the MTS transmission format, RCA had the first consumer MTS TV set ready for stores. At the Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory (then a department of the CBS Technology Center) we hurriedly acquired the MTS stereo generator necessary to test the product. The results, published in the September '84 *VR*, were fairly encouraging. The set's MTS decoder delivered clean sound with little distortion or noise. However, stereo separation—the all-important difference between right and left channels that creates the stereo image—was a lackluster 16 dB. We called it "acceptable if not exceptional."

We always assumed that the stereo separation of MTS products would improve as manufacturers gradually got the hang of the new technology. It didn't—at least not much. During 1988, APEL has tested 18 products that incorporate MTS decoders. These include 10 VCRs, six monitor/receivers and two stereo-TV tuners. The average midrange separation (at 100% modulation) was 22.5 dB, with units ranging from a miserable 0 dB to an excellent 37 dB. The MTS standard easily allows for stereo separation well in excess of 30 dB; we think any MTS product today ought to be in that range. But only three of the 18 products we've tested this year broke that 30 dB mark.

All of the MTS products we've evaluated this year were from major video manufacturers—people who should know better. If you want to see a textbook example of how bad an MTS decoder can be, check

out our Test Report on the Tatung 2020CPX in this very issue. Careful readers of our Test Reports should note that while we don't always criticize a product severely for offering only average MTS performance, "average" in this category is still far below the performance we would like to see.

Why do most MTS products fall so short of the system's potential? I think there are several reasons. For one thing, most consumers haven't demanded better performance from MTS products, so

manufacturers haven't felt enough pressure to beef up their MTS specs. Interestingly, there usually isn't anything physically wrong with the MTS decoders we test. They simply haven't been adjusted (or aligned) properly at the factory. One reason for this is that professional MTS test equipment, such as the Modulation Sciences stereo generator we use at APEL, is expensive. Most manufacturers still haven't invested in the kind of equipment they need to properly align MTS decoders on their assembly lines. In addition, some manufacturers I've talked to complain that dbx, the company that designed part of the MTS system, hasn't been fully cooperative in helping them maximize MTS performance.

Is there any hope for improvement in the near future? I'm afraid not. I don't think consumers will start demand-

ing better stereo until the TV networks start delivering more and better programming in stereo. NBC's recent stereo coverage of the Olympics was a big step in the right direction, but the network did almost nothing to promote the idea of watching the games in stereo. The recent death of Recoton marketing director Paul Perez is another setback for TV stereo (see "Viewpoint," page 4). Paul almost single-handedly taught the video industry what good stereo ought to sound like. Without his constant agitation for better sound I'm afraid the industry will never make stereo a top priority.

The sad story of MTS performance in today's gear is a case of appearance vs. reality: Simply building an MTS decoder into a VCR or TV set is enough to let the manufacturer put the magic word "stereo" on the box. That's all it takes to sell the product. Consumers don't know enough—and too many manufacturers don't care enough—to make sure that the stereo circuitry performs as advertised. □

Video Review technical editor Frank Barr is also president of the Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory (APEL) in Bethel, CT.





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